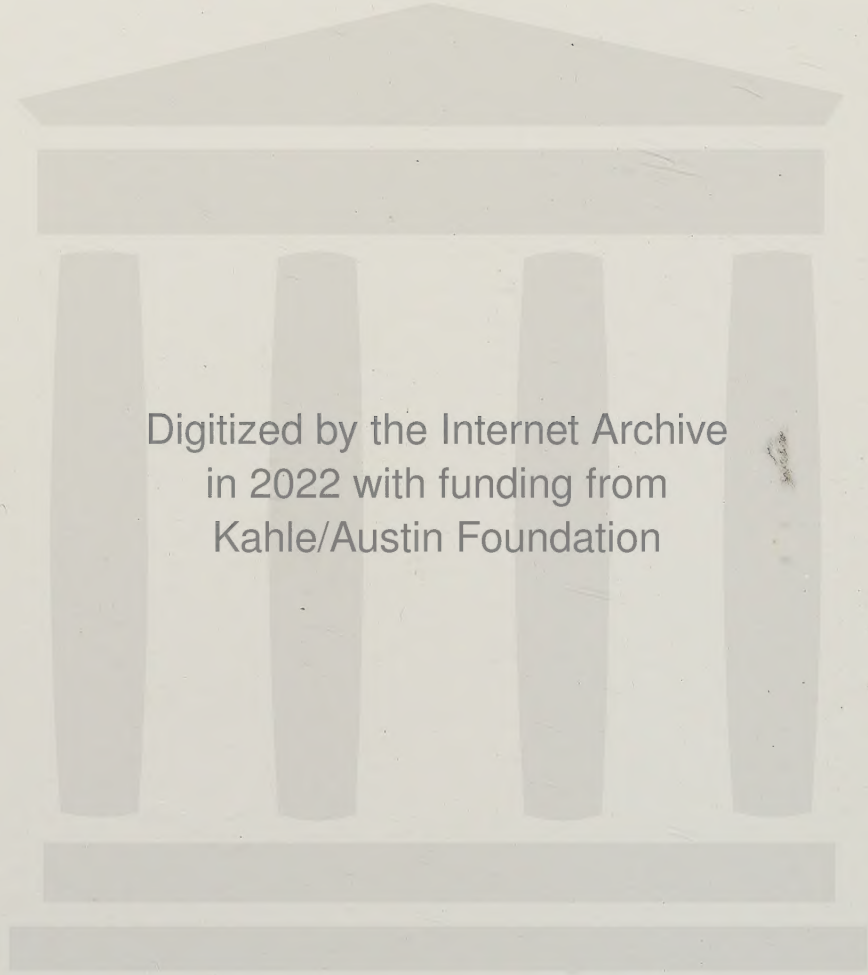
Five Times of Prayer

a poem

Sharon Marcus



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To Marguerite,

With love,

Aaron Marcus

Five Times of Prayer

a poem

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FIVE TIMES OF PRAYER

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FAJR

The Prayer Before Dawn

Winter came early and stayed late this year, did you
notice that winter came early and stayed late this year?
Even though it hasn't been very cold and there was little snow, by
the end of March that heavy metal fatigue which might have been
Nothing more than waiting for spring had certainly set in,
last night when I woke for early prayers there was a thin
Coat of snow on the roof, on the grass and the branched old
arms of oak, but my body did not weep and break on snows
Of remembrance, winters past and still to come, I merely sighed,
we have after all reached the yellow phase, daffodils and
Forsythia, while up above magnolia buds slowly emerge in
Asiatic stillness, their white and pink a promise of colors
To be born in this opening prayer, this time of birth among
the pearls of mountain laurel, now my God come, teach me to
Understand these signs of earth and death, how are we to
perceive this persistent renewal deluding us again and again,
Is this Your trick to tease us like trompe l'oeil, is it some
magician's sleight of hand or are we to lift the veil illusion
Whispers and weaves, are we to study the twitch, the turn of
every scene opening for us, find what is constant, what remains,
The permanent less than a hair's breadth from the impermanent;
the fierce wind which blows late in March shifting the panes

Of glass in their frames sometimes comes from the south bringing a
garment out of season, now my God teach us to discern
The truth and its signs, show us the path through all this that
wisdom cuts. On a bright spring morning filled with light
And the longing for sound from the strangely missing song
birds, when the weeping Japanese cherry puts out its first
Frail flowers and the little peach tree bears a scant outline
in pink, when we wake at last for this first time of prayer
And realize the mountain we have played about like children,
where we lingered in oblivious or wretched ignorance, this great
Mountain that we took for mere scenery, a backdrop for innocence,
this is something we have to climb, but where to begin and how?
Sometimes the answer comes, a direct summons, here, climb here, get your
ropes, get your hiking boots, start now, while for others the call
Is indirect, a sound we deduce in retrospect, some grace or wisdom
we think must have melted the final ice in a winter's heart,
God alone must have reached down allowing His permanence to carve
a notch in this heavy heart filled with the woes and cravings
Impermanence is subject to, God alone must have wakened us from
the lethargic games we played to relieve the pain, this time of awakened
Grace is our *shari'at,* the first step on that path which has been
here all along but obscured by a thick undergrowth, confusion
Or misconception breeding recklessly and multiplying themselves into
Dante's dark woods, it is indeed a hell which only a wise man,
An experienced guide can lead us from. Now in a few delirious days,
unexpected reprieve, warmth dropped like a saddle on the horse of the mind,
Magnolias split their confining seams and explode in pale pink goblets
hiding the grey branches of the tree, the weeping Japanese cherry
Hangs down heavily laden fronds of flowers, even the little peach tree

profers a still, silent crown in pure pink; from our second
Floor windows we can see the convent grounds across the way where
an old nun in a long, tan apron worn over her black habit
Is out tending the flowers, a wheelbarrow as old as the nun herself pressed
once again into active service rolling slowly before her, then the
Last day of March which wavers in fickle disregard of time or the body
or the mind blows in on a winter storm from the west, moving
The trees like batons in this season's symphony, dropping magnolia petals
like a wanton gift across the ground and we are fooled into
April with more inches of snow lying thick on the ground and
on burdened trees than we have seen all winter, this spring-
Time season of prayer is always filled with surprise, surprise that we
keep getting it wrong and surprise when we occasionally get it
Right; like dark, rotting clusters of magnolia flowers dead before
they could offer their exotic perfume to the world, we die on
The branch of every good intention not brought to fruition, we want to be
good but we cling to the brambles and habits of the bad because this
Is what we know, this is the familiar where we are at home; without
the determined push of faith we slip on the ice and collide with unexpected
Drifts in the snow, but springtime snow is a forgiving thing, like the
errors and miscalculations and unwitting ignorance embedded in
This first *waqt* when we turn back again and again to revisit
where we have been, when we long like Orpheus for one last look, yet
How soon the sun melts the snow and releases loosely frozen locks, we have our
feet on the path and God in His mercy forgives us again and again until
We learn what we have to learn; some flowers in fact survive this
last breath of winter and some die, no miracles here, only the ordinary
Grace which drapes our days with promise, with possibility, while heavy
branches break in the wind and we discover what it means to bend.

In the stillness of the hours before dawn there is peace, no distractions, the world lies asleep dreaming that the dream is not a dream, in the quiet of Stars and the early rising moon, a brilliant slice of light against the night, we recite the first prayer, out loud perhaps and then in silence as grace Or the wings of angels fill the room with fragrant light, a sweetness like honey, a happiness like bliss as we turn to You and learn this Point, this meaning, the only thing there is to do with our life is dedicate it to You, anything but that is either frivolous, foolish or filled with Casual ignorance, O Allah will You teach us these words, will You show us how to distinguish true from false, good from bad, right From wrong, will You save us from the simple errors in judgment which take us back to torment every day, will You be our friend, Will You send us a guide for this tricky path that slips and slopes and slants, will You offer Your hand of support and walk with us, Send someone who knows the way to show us how the path is cut through the dark woods, how the heavy mountain can be climbed; Now that our love for You has risen up in our hearts like the bright yellow daffodils resurrected from the storm, rising in the grace and Forgiving warmth of Your sun, Your light, will You keep us away, will You deny us access at the very moment we reach the gate, knowing At last where You are, or will You show us the way in, light up the dark path through the woods, even blow up the mountain lying directly across The road we must take? When I first met my beloved sheikh I asked him almost at the beginning if this heart which felt like a mountain Of stone could not simply be blasted away, but he laughed quietly saying it would not be like that, it would be like water falling on stone, one drop At a time, and I thought of the ancient stone stairway at my college where the steps had curved beneath the climbing feet of generations and generations, It would be like that, the slow dissolution of stone—habits, attitudes, thoughts

and disposition shaped in the year filled waters that lay ahead; now as I
Look up at the magnolia tree and see two-thirds of its flowers withered
on the branch giving the whole tree a semblance of death, I cannot help
But wonder how it is that some flowers live and some flowers die side
by side on the branch, brothers and sisters born in the same genetic stream
Yet the heart of one is touched while the others lie dormant, unopened from
birth to death in the mysterious dance which shapes our life, O Allah
You can do anything, change anything, Your light, Your grace, Your wisdom
is here for everything that lives and dies, what makes a few reach
Out to You as the rest turn away, what subtle thing did we do
right in the great confusion of all that was wrong, was the radical
Curiosity to know which could never be satisfied enough, was it the taste,
one pure drop given to an infant, was it that or the idea of absolute
Purity and goodness protected in the heart of a child? In this chilly
austerity, the dark hours before dawn we are not touched by questions,
There are only answers in these wakeful hours of prayer, ourselves submerged
completely in You, here we take our firstborn steps to You bathed in
The innocence of our infancy, now as an unseasonal frost kills the remaining
flowers on the magnolia tree we pass through these April corridors in
Time contemplating what lives and what dies, what flowers and what fails to
flower, understanding the season of birth, relinquishing death in the clear
Certainty You exist and there is no death in You Allah, the permanent and absolute.

At the beginning it did not occur to me this was something I could not
Do on my own, at the beginning I did not really know what this was,
there was no single, towering experience which brought me to Your divine
Feet, what there was instead was a steady accumulation of incidents which
pointed to verification, but verification of what I couldn't say, I didn't
Know, what I knew immediately was relief from the causal nightmare which became

absurdity culminating in a shroud of pointlessness that decorated my days
And festooned my nights, all this was lifted, ripped aside in the stream,
the beauty of Your attributes unfolding so rapidly it left me speechless and
Breathless, the love, compassion, tolerance, purity, grace and wisdom once hidden
now began to open, flowers along the streets and laneways in this springtime
Prayer transforming the ordinary into gardens where a restfulness re-
sembling peace had been preserved; what eluded me was the seat,
A throne where the essence is manifest in the divine, the power, the majestic
One in totality, this I could not even guess or speculate about then, but
Now as the dogwood slowly begins to uncurl its flowers like lace I
have learned not only that You exist, I have also learned nothing else
But You exists, I have seen Your golden throne although I have never
seen You, no one has, You remain the mystery the soul longs for, hungers
For, it begs to know You in these small dark hours before the world
wakes, it has always longed for this from the outset in spite of
Forgetting for a time. There is a moment in our lives when we can look back
and see that, in a sense, we have always been seekers ardently courting
The truth in the fragrant grace of a cool spring day filled with transcendent
light, whether our steps took us forward or dropped us back, every
Event can be quantified on the great scale of inner right and wrong
which charted the way to You Allah, beloved Lord, everything we did or
Failed to do was part of the seeking, the search for You, for meaning
and wisdom, our whole life has been the path we walked blindly at
Times, innocently sometimes and then on other days with all the fire and
fervor we could find, the difference was that we didn't know that we
Didn't know when the sceptical chorus of doubt, suspicion, contempt
and ignorance resounded in our ears and emptied our hearts. All that
Changed when the first door on the frontier opened at last disclosing
worlds within worlds we had deliberately, consciously excluded

In the past and now undertook to explore, all that changed when
wisdom became the spark igniting a flickering awareness of You,
Your presence, Your quality of mercy, Your justice, love and compassion,
it changed like a dark saddled sky abruptly streaked with light, fine
Rose colored fingers of light in radiant illumination across the night;
for myself, after passing through all the preliminary phases, the search
Which finally recognized itself, knew it to be what it was, there
began a period of waiting for the teacher, the master who would take
Me where I could not travel alone—by now persuaded by the texts,
the scriptures, the sutras insisting on the need for such a guide—
And it became part of my life to visit, to listen to anyone who passed
through town offering versions of truth or wisdom, but nothing
Happened, the most articulate, the most cogent failed to invite me
along, the lesser failed to hold my attention. During these years that
I waited, efforts to prepare myself, to be fit for the master who
would find me were concentrated, the study of sacred texts, of accounts
Written by those who reported progress on their path and most important,
the devotional exercises, both physical and contemplative, all based on
What was available in print; now everything I read earnestly promised
the right teacher, the guide would find me when I was ready,
He would watch me from a distance in ways that seemed only marginally
comprehensible at the time, yet he would know and come for me when
The time was right, I believed that as the daily practices increased in
intensity and duration and the endless conversation documenting
Each inner and outer step continued by day and by night; little else seemed
relevant, we did our work which had opened up mysteriously and left
Us quite free except for short, demanding intervals, but our focus was inner,
our intention unswerving and still the master had not appeared, finally
It occurred to me if the teacher I so urgently needed had not come looking

for me, it was up to me to go looking for him, "California," I said
One day, "At the end of this year when our contract, our obligations end
I'm going to California where gurus of every size and color abound,
If he can't come searching for me, I'd better go searching for him, at
the end of December I'll leave." My guru, my beloved sheikh came
For me at the end of November, he spoke, he sang, he reached into my heart
and held it in his hand a moment offering the simple, exquisite truth
Of God, all the searching, all the seeking was for that essence, that
power who is God, there was no need to go anywhere because God
Is right here within the heart itself and we are within God. Today
the cold rain of April came mixed with snow then changed to
Snow alone, heavy wet flakes falling on the ears, the lips, the nose
and eyes, outer entrances to this first time of prayer, a gateway
To this *shari'at* path, the obligation to love God, to serve Him and
pray, did you noticc that winter came early and stayed late
This year, did you notice that winter stayed late reminding us how
to proceed inwardly and outwardly, standing, bowing in *ruku'*, prostrating
In *sajdah* as we open the inner gates, the eye which sees only You,
the ear which hears only Your sound, the mouth which tastes only You
And says only Your name in this pure time of first love, the innocence
and unquestionable bliss in God's garden, a paradise we lived in
Day after day because we had found each other, Allah, my sheikh
who was the pure light of His divine explanation and the soul,
The *alif, lam* and *mim* in this clear springtime heaven I had been
transported to, an inner sweetness once understood which can
Be projected outwardly. O Allah we see Your grace and Your
greatness in the cool clusters of cherry blossoms up and down
This ordinary street, in the still yellow ranks of daffodils which
rejoice in our extraordinary run of days, cool, cloudy and

Filled with scattered rain, and in the flowering trees moving slowly
high above with the wind, the flowers that survived the snow
And frost now sturdy veterans in this parade, this celebration
of Your mystery while the quietly unfolding dogwood trees perform
Their fugue-like solemnity, a rapture duplicated by brilliant fuscia
blasts from the trumpet section, azaleas unleasing wild banks of live
Pure color, Your palette unmatched in the unvoiced silence flowing
through virginal days and nights which end in prayer, this prayer,
This time before dawn when we wake to the echoing sound of creation,
God in His majesty tugging at planets and stars, toppling old worlds
And giving birth to the new, a generation of generation which allows us
to examine our own birth, to make a fundamental inquiry about
The origin and the end bringing us back to You in a blaze of first
days love, the paradise of merely sitting, looking, seeing You knowing
That You also see us, it was like that at the beginning with the *qutb,*
the radiantly luminous sheikh who embodied Your explanations and
Your meaning, it was the time of birth, a cell by cell transformation
he initiated in the bright sun of truth radiating from every direction,
It was truth, it was wisdom, it was the inescapable transcendent
reality that You alone exist, it was the rapid transition from
Limp hanging leaves folded like butterflies in lime green splendor to
the fully arched maple stretching with strength in the sun, all this
At the beginning with my guru who was father and master
and precious friend.

There was no longer any distinction between
The miraculous and the ordinary, each day was a net set to
snare a succession of small events which taken together meant
Something you could not account for in the usual way, take

searching for a room, a place to stay close by, I went
Looking and found nothing, "Tell him," a friend advised, I duly
reported my unsuccessful search and looked again without
Any luck, "Tell him," a friend advised, and I did, quietly pointing out
that I needed somewhere to stay if I was to do the inner and outer
Work he had given me, he nodded carefully, thoughtfully, and I set out
again, arriving this time at the home of an elderly woman who
Was blind; when her phone rang I offered to answer it, explaining
to the caller I was merely someone passing by looking for
Somewhere to live, "O I know a place," came the cheerful response
accompanied with a name and address a stone's throw from
Where I wanted to be, had to be; when I told my sheikh how the search
had worked out he only said, "There, do you see how easily things
Can be arranged when you put absolute trust in God?" This first
time of prayer is the paradise where longing is finally stilled and
Satisfied, where we begin to know what it means to know as knowledge
is translated into the language of wisdom word by word, letter by
Letter, where the honest transactions defined by truth are declarations, flowers
born in May with amazing strength and purity, with colors that are loud
Concertos in their grace and sweep, O Allah this first garden of prayer
where we finally elude the thorns and fall instead on flowers is
The heliotropic turn, we to You and You to us, we are the small birds
gobbling up electric green flower clusters on these newly
Awakened trees who cannot even dream the life of the tree while You
give birth to whole forests and feed deep, dark oceans we have never seen;
Let us fly on those rich medieval ikons from the dark woods to a forest
of light, gild us with Your love, carve the minute diptych wings with
Scenes that speak of permanence hiding inside long garments of flesh, hiding
in that one imperishable place of the heart where You exist in me

And I exist in You, because now we are obliged to relinquish the images
created by any artistry less than Yours, abandon the science whose first
Hypothesis is not You, and certainly turn our backs on the arbitrary
articles articulated in a grovelling psychology lost among the thorns of me
And mine, guilt and retribution, the fantasies born in a wilderness
bred by the qualities and actions native to the unreclaimed self,
The being who does not know himself or herself, who thinks the shadow,
the mere illusion is in fact the reality and looks deliberately away
From the truth, the cause which is the source of our existence, the origin
of all meaning, O Allah without You this was a tasteless life,
Before the first time of prayer there was nothing but rumor and dis-
satisfaction, but now we walk Your fragrant laneways, truly a bower of bliss

Although suffering and sorrow are not easily eluded even here. Now we
know there is not much to choose between happiness and sadness as
The world sees it, they are beside the point, a distraction from the point where
balance and grace hold us up, if we fall into happiness abandoning all
Thoughts of You, forgetting the schools of wisdom where we have been sent
to study, indulging gratification on a sensory plane, how different is this
From plunging into the sea of sorrow selfhood loves to wallow in,
how different is this from explicit pain which burrows through levels and layers
Of prayer interrupting the conversation before it has begun, O this is
a long cool springtime, a garden waiting for Your flowers to open
In the heart, learning to pull the weeds before they choke the crops,
listening for the wind and learning to bend before we break, listening
For the rain and learning to catch the drops of grace as they fall one
by one on the soft yielding soil eager to nourish, eager to feed,
Ready for change, admitting the need for change, now we know the body
is a trap we can escape because God Himself will reach down to

Pull us out, pull us up but we have to dig our own way out too, we
have to acknowledge what we are and what we want to be, with
Great deliberation we must eliminate the bad, the obstacles, the impediments
and transplant the good, with God's help and the light of a luminous
Being we alone must enter the dark interiors, transform the overgrown
wilderness which looks harmless enough at first, petty things, arbitrary
Things we don't necessarily want yet cling to once they are ours, all
this must go, the silly, the frivolous, the charming decorations of selfhood
Must be stripped bare, down to a finer, cleaner garment, the pure inner light
in the radiant soul—for some this kind of reparation and restoration may be
Painful while others jump joyfully into the siege relieved at last, the not knowing,
the wondering, hoping timorously that change would explode like a bomb on
The outside, now we know we must die by our own hand, walk with
the confident triumph of warriors through the dark woods cutting a clear
Path as we go, now we understand the battleground as well as the playing field,
they lie within, those great spoiled tracts where the clotted terrain is to be cleared
Growth by growth, vine by vine, even seed by seed until all that remains is
the open space, a pure desert of sun and wind and stars, a place where
We can learn to pray once the tangled, knotted undergrowth is gone. Allah,
beloved master, supreme Lord, the only friend who will not turn away or ignore
Us when the way is hard and the work austere, remind us we are not
required to suffer. O sorrow will make its own way in but we are
Not required to suffer. If hard times come and we cling to You knowing
that You are the only treasure, the only help, it will strengthen our purpose,
Even so we are not required to suffer, we must detach ourselves equally
from pleasure and pain, they exist out there as resonating curtains around
The illusions we choose to accept as the truth, the reality itself, when all
we need to do is kick the stones from our path to be free and remember
That happiness comes and goes as inexplicably as sadness does, why cling

to either when You alone have permanence my God, You alone exist
Without beginning or end, the radiant uncreated life responsible for
all creation. When the cold rain falls and falls then stops and falls again
We have to know the difference between Your calendar, the umbrella for
eternity, and ours which offers no shelter from time, we have to persist
With devotion until the end of a story is revealed, sometimes what looks
like happiness becomes the root of sorrow and what we take for misfortune
Is its opposite, if we allow the wisdom that rises in unswerving faith
to grow in the cool shadows which fall as Your grace, we will learn
To understand the meaning encoded in each event, we will pray to be
forgiven with the breath of the moon and stay in Your praise with
The breath of the sun. At this first time of prayer in the early hours
before daylight breaks we stand in the revelation realizing what
This birth means, where we come from, who we are and what we have to
take back, we know the world of souls when we first spoke the words
Of pure faith in You, realizing we must learn those words and say them again
here so that we may say them again there, with You, we must study
The world and understand it well enough to avoid the illusion it is real,
to evade the snares and traps designed to persuade our senses it exists
As something other than illusion, we must taste the world, know the joys
and sorrows it projects and say it is good but not good enough, we have
To know the taste of the world cannot be compared with Your taste, Your
fragrant bliss, we have to recognize the essential human gift is choice,
We are free to be good, free to be bad, free to know You, free to turn our
backs; we write our own destiny with the choices we make, if it were
All prescribed in advance there would be no need to come here, we are sent
with brown eyes or blue but what we do, what we see, what we say
Is our own, so choose to believe and you will understand, wisdom grows
in the fertile springtime of absolute faith, St. Augustine knew this and so

Did St. Anselm, the truth has always been available, we must look hard
at the things we've made into idols, the things we worship, there is
Only one God whose secret is sometime revealed in multiplicity or
diversity, let us not be deluded by the endless wonders You spread
Before us, let us not take our own artistry for Yours and confuse
the image with the reality, O Allah we see everything changing
Except You in this damaged season; now a heavy green canopy of leaves
hangs above the street and the great screen of maples across
The way hides the convent garden from our inquiring eyes, let us
not presume to understand the heart of another, God has the key
To every heart al-Ghazali said, and opens each with whichever one
He chooses, O Allah teach us the secrets of the melting heart and let
Us learn the way to You, the prayer, the one prayer recited in the pure
open space where You wait in Your exquisite majesty, where we
Turn at last to You, revelation on the first hot day under canopies
of rampant wisteria as we watch azaleas die and rhododendrons
Spring to life in pale circles of mauve and pink.

There is peace in these
early morning hours before dawn when we wake to the intoxicating scent
Of roses and the sweet polonia flowers, there is peace knowing we believe,
we have complete faith in You so that our wisdom and understanding
Will flower, will grow, knowing we had it backwards before, there is
no bridge to faith, no mountain to blow up, there is only
You, Your presence drop by drop annihilating rock and stone, transforming
earth and air and sky, carving Yourself with letters of pure light
In the heart, there is only You, Your grace made known, flowers waking
the inner heart in the solitude of One; this is the first time of prayer
When we learn to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad with stunning

clarity and total conviction, this is the first time of prayer when we look
Away from the world and see God's kingdom, the world of souls and what
lies ahead, we find the path through the dark woods which does not lead
To hell but to heaven, we find the guide who has cut his way through darkness
with weapons of light, letters circling our heart with meaning, who we are,
Where we come from, where we will go, why we have come at all to this
unlit world, this confusion of light and dark where what we often perceive
Is merely grey, undefined without the illumination wisdom alone presents; now
we lie at the feet of truth and the beginning of our way, now we touch
The feet and kiss the sweet hand which holds up mystery as a treasure to
be examined while we celebrate Your praise through part of the night,
In the hours before dawn, at midday, late afternoon, evening and
after dark, we celebrate Your love to know Your peace, to taste
Your bliss, we kiss that hand to learn Your secrets, so that we can separate
light from dark, truth from deception, to be Your child. This is the un-
Qualified rapture of first love, innocent love untouched by thought,
uncomplicated by desire, it is the purest connection defined by faith,
By trust and the certainty born in that trust, a time when all
we need is to sit together, be together in the unspoken, unsung
Harmony of the single note vibrating a perfect unison before the world
wakes around us or within us, a garden where Your praise resonates
From the heart of each flower, bush and tree, where every soft green blade
of grass bends in *sajdah* with the wind. We lived in such a garden
With our sheikh during the early days, an inexplicable clearing in
the dark woods where we could rest in the comfort of his love awhile
Before proceeding on, the journey from *waqt* to *waqt* that is the journey
of our lives season by season and year by year, step by step on this path
Which began in You, leads to You and ends in You, we lived in a state
that seemed to be constant revelation as the truth unfolded

In a golden shower nourishing the seeds of transformation, the cell by cell transmutation taking us to a finer, purer version of who we Were while preserving our essential characteristics, the subtle interplay dictating strength and weakness, gift and failure, song and noise, we Still remain who we are, this garden is virtuosic in diversity; I remember the reflexive curiosity I used to bring to my inspection Of newcomers, you, you I wondered, what are you doing here, until it occurred to me God wants one of everything, He needs every Sample, every type or species in His garden; of course my surprise about certain arrivals was nothing compared with my amazement at The continuing stream of departures, it seemed impossible to me that once a person had tasted the ineffable sweetness, the immediacy of the divine Presence this person could ever turn away, look away, be satisfied by less than totality, but that is not the way of the world. Now in our Long cool springtime shaded with deep green canopies, branches of oak, maple and beech, we walk those early days again, the returning sun, The transforming warmth which is Your grace, flowering wisdom which opens like the sudden gush of roses everywhere, pink, white, scarlet And yellow, all perfume, all a blissful scent born on the unlit morning air, purity, fragrance and prayer all prostrate in ecstatic worship of You.

DHUHR

The Midday Prayer

Summer is not supposed to be a time for
dying, a season for death, summer is the season
Of fire and flowers exploding on all sides,
summer is the declaration of innocence and desire,
The exclamations shouted in joy or whispered in simmering
silence, a sensuous rapture breeding bliss as
The fruit of desire; so what is all this dying about,
why are we surrounded by this unseasonable crop, this
Winter, this constant confrontation with beginnings and
endings, with life and death on a July day when
Remembrance and recognition coincide like passengers on
a ship at sea, ah yes, I know you now, we might never
Have met before but it seems I know you well enough;
ah love, the day of your death, a flower which
Blooms and fades on its own, this year that day came
shrouded with another death to come, mine, my brother's,
My sister's, all, all of us like fruit hanging from a tree
and more than ready to fall. The wind comes blowing the
Leaves on the trees in a restless dance, they shimmer, they sway
turning a silver side up and the long graceful fronds at
The top of the pines swing like hair, curling a moment then
settling quietly until they are blown once again. O God,

My God, my Lord supreme who rules my days and runs
my nights, O God my midday prayer comes from an
Inextinguishable pit of fire that must be subdued, the anger,
the hunger for food other than Yours, O God, my God,
Take this scorched prayer which dies before it rises, take
my parched fruit in the burning noontime declared by
Passion, by the screaming self which shuts me away from
Your grace and make it true, burn my fire with Yours,
Ignite the flame of that perfect prayer where You alone
exist and I am nowhere to be found, light the pure
Flame and burn my house to the ground in this summer song
of life and death. Let this time be my *tariqat,* my path
Defined by You, in You, forever irrefutably You, let this time
extinguish all the reckless fires, the ignorant gestures
Born and raised before wisdom and the light revealed by
focus, by faith and clarity had their say, let this time
Strip my path of past and present, of memory and all that lies
ahead while I rehearse the scenes that lit my way or blocked
My path in a fiery noon, transforming grace from then to now.
There was always a hunger to know which led me by the nose
From disaster to disaster, courting the cold fruit of pure reason,
logic locked in a box, there was a time I thought that fruit
Would feed the need to understand, there was a time I thought pure
colonnaded avenues of wisdom would open from the closed box,
But that was the subtle ignorance which looked upon itself as wise,
that was a barren tree, at any rate a tree incapable of
Producing, presenting flowers of grace, leaves to spread a cooling shade
against the midday sun and sweet fruit to quench the curling
Thirst—books, how I looked at books, answers must surely be

in books or so it seemed and so they said, the arts and science,
Philosophy and mathematics, if they hadn't found the truth, discovered
what was what, what needed to be what or what must necessarily
Be what, where else to look I could not say. Still, the only answers
which opened before me led nowhere, routes inauspiciously marked
No exit just before the end, a door closing in the face slammed shut by
someone I naively supposed was a friend; wasn't the highest,
The purest expression of our humanity in music and poetry, wasn't
the clearest articulation of the human condition, the human
Dilemma in philosophic propositions and that ardent analysis of
language itself, if not, what then, if those brief, breathless
Intimations, the cloudless pinnacles, the pure intoxication which some-
times promised what it could clearly not deliver, if they
Could not satisfy what longed to know, what then? Never for
a moment relinquishing these suppositions, I did not connect the
Blind acts of despair which clouded my days and abdicated my
nights, I did not connect the sorrow which flowed from each
Engagement of a dead end, a cul-de-sac or stony abutment
precluding passage with any thought, assumption or attitude,
It seemed only the natural consequence of the bizarre absurdity
filtering through my perception of existence, reality, however you
Want to describe what passed for truth and clarity in this obnoxious
world where shadows hid dark, destructive forms and mirrors
Showed nothing but faces of the dead, because in this world defined
by parallels and paradigms death alone was the reward and
Death alone was the end; so I persisted hurtling to preclusive doom
protected only by the Unseen from the endless shower, the *shaktis*
Unsheathed by unwitting invitation and desire, more than half in love
with death, the easy, easeful alternative there in a world where

Innocent ego reigns supreme and fear eagerly waits, ready to
attach itself securely no matter what shimmering, delusive form
This perverted sense of I takes from day to day—not difficult
now that these deceptions lie dormant to understand what went
Wrong and how, but then, ah then I was a blind person dreaming
a world which could not be described. Life kept unfolding as
It must, some good, some bad, every event acted out against this
backdrop, the crude scenery which did not even pretend to be
Persuasive, accurate, nothing but self-confessed fakery, like the
image of a famous person or place dropped down to let a photo-
Graph include your own delusion with another, yet even so there were
one or two intimations of change, subtle, unobtrusive at the time,
Decipherable retrospectively if not then, there was a night we
drove around town studying the scenes and talking, we always
Talked that one and I, about everything, minutely, in detail,
ever expanding circles around the luminous point we failed to
Perceive at all, or possibly this was my failure alone, when out of
nowhere as it seemed, the question was put to me, who are you? Not
Even bothering to disguise a certain contempt for what sounded like
mere metaphysical platitude, done with that, polished off such
Inadequate styles of thought and speech how many years ago, the
answer quickly marshalled itself to my lips and out: I am
The sum total of historical events which constitute this, the
thing that calls itself by my name, and I think we can assume that's
It, the whole story. Outrage and silence locked awhile in combat, conflict
finally ending in a cool inquiry, how can you know, how can you
Answer so quickly, without reflection, without introspection, how can
you glibly say what you cannot know? Well but I do you see, for
Years I toyed with questions like that, answers are available, speedy,

there is an inner rapid sort system which reaches in to pull the
Thought together and out, no waiting, don't you see it's easy for me? But
the question was put again and again over some weeks and months,
Ringed about with unhappy dissatisfaction as the same answer came
again and again until I had to concede there was a flaw in
This floor I could not drop beneath or rise above, a flaw I
could not quite identify or bypass without a complete overhaul
Of myself and my world. O my Lord of grace You alone can forgive
the ignorance of my summer days, You alone can hold this heart in
Your hand, You alone can shake this fruit from the tree, I am still
who I am and who I was my Lord of grace, my Lord of truth
And wisdom, You alone could move me from that place or this,
You alone can transform my capacity to know, to believe, to trust
In nothing but You. Now hear my summer song of days gone wrong and
let the small rain fall, cool the streets running south or sideways
From the center, cool the flames at noon and set my feet at last
on the *tariqat* which is truth, which knows goodness, love, mercy,
Tolerance, inner patience and absolute gratitude, let me find the pure
wisdom along this path pouring from faith that never deviates, show
Me my Lord of bliss how to purify myself in prayer, to please You in
all my words and acts, how to earn the indescribable sweetness
Of Your presence that comes when all the flaws are stripped away and
sometimes even when they are not; this is a sweetness which cannot
Be compared to joy or bliss except as the joy within joy and the
happiness within bliss, O my exalted Lord who has allowed me such
A taste from time to time let me burn in Your love alone, let me
live in the fire, like Abraham, Your friend, fearing nothing in
The heart of the flames because You alone exist. And so my gracious
Lord pulled me from that state of ignorance, darkness, the time of

Unknowing before creation when there was no distinction between
light and dark, no true sense of right and wrong except for
A stand around the edge far from the place where wisdom lights
a beacon illuminating the shadows, the dark recesses, there,
But unacknowledged by most—O my Lord grant me Your supreme
grace to use the wisdom You placed in every heart—yet slowly,
So slowly He brought me out, although everything changed I hardly
noticed what I had been was somehow different from what I
Would become, I could not account for the year that was like
a seal of peace on a poisoned life and 'Izra'il, the angel of death,
The fire that burns our life clean at the end left me alone for awhile,
I tasted the joy of my own birth in an ocean of light for the first
Time as we plunged into every licit and illicit pathway, into every mystery
which had been disallowed, every unexamined rhapsody of sensual bliss
Wearing the garments of grace, another bliss I had only begun to
reckon with because although I searched with fervor, it is
Also true I did not quite know what it was I sought. In that
noon, that summertime season when walking these unexplored avenues
And alleys was all that mattered and arcades draped in the purest
music, sounds from another realm, wrapped us in inner fire, we
Fell heir to a wild, rich harvest from the east, sutras, prayers, mantras,
idols and ikons; scriptures which had been hidden under rocks, in caves
For hundreds of years were taken from their hiding places, translated
and brought to generations in the west hungry to know the secrets
Held by ancient masters, seers, sages, illuminated beings, hungry for
the alien truth which would bring them to their own, books of
Prophecy and revelation all dumped on our laps in that miraculous
siege of seeking, and never Allah, beloved Lord, master of my
Life and soul, never a word before its time; that was my *shari'at,*

the first *waqt* of prayer, the beginning I had to learn from a
Place made ready to know, my prayers at the dawn of beginning,
how curious the path to this opening, how dark and terrible the tangled
Route of woods and forest with no way out, mountains and valleys set
in interlocking mazes to daze and amaze, how impossible my
Beloved, O patient Lord of my soul, to escape without Your hand
of grace, and how impossible that Your majesty could incorporate such
An insignificant particle, a spiraling spot of dust, bring it to rest in
the place You had prepared before the beginning, before I could know
What the treasure is, where it is to be found and how to look within.

So many nights we drove deserted streets and talked, so late it
Was sometimes morning before we went to bed, there is something about early
morning light on a summer day, shafts of clarity opening the world
With easy optimism, an almost reckless sense of hope, wonder, purity,
and the talk now was always about enlightenment, states of
Consciousness, how to approach the higher revelatory states, and
illumination, the sudden, lightning quick transformation from
Dross to gold, the alchemy of wisdom, the gnostic revolution enacted
in a state beyond dreams. If we came illicitly to the entrance
Way, brought by psychotropic interventions, how was it possible
to remain, how once addicted to realms beyond circumscribing
Intellect and dwarfed reason could we return to the world as it
had seemed, without realizing the very thing which brought us to
The door would keep us from opening it, without understanding the
illusion of seeming, the false truth we embraced so eagerly, ravished
By an appetite for the reality which could only elude us because
the illusion itself had to be rejected before we could proceed, while the
Longing to know, to experience directly was so acute I would have

willingly sacrificed any part of my body, a token offered in the battle
To know, and so we spent what nights we could in speculation,
talk that was focused sometimes on *The Diamond Sutra* or how to
Read the *I Ching* or the visions of Milarepa or the techniques
of Ramana Maharshi and others who came dressed in robes of
The wise, hardly aware the sacrifice had already been made, this
body a vehicle we need for the journey we have undertaken had
Already been laid on the line, a natural proposition when you
make yourself the subject of your own experiments, in fact
We looked upon our lives as the proving ground for every
supposition, we sampled ancient remedies from different
Systems of medicine as readily as we swallowed the books
or hurried to meetings with visiting gurus of every size
And color, all had a role in the great inquiry, the investigation of ourselves
we documented with the fervor of science and the emancipating
Licenses granted by an umbrella in the arts. Music, sound,
vibration, the vibratory rate became an important adjunct of the
Study, the crucible we deliberately cooked our lives in, searching
for the note which rang true, the frequency which would be
A carrier wave to states that promised if not wisdom itself, at
least pathways to wisdom; music, this had always meant
Bach and Mozart, suddenly included the bent and scorching string
of a guitar amplified, broken or pulled out of shape, Jimi
Hendrix became Beethoven in America for a whole generation while
the poets receded in majesty behind the Cold Mountain poet,
Anonymous, elusive, lifting the curtain for a cursory glimpse,
that paradisal realm where the I no longer struggles to rule.
On one night among many driving the deserted streets at night,
late, late, it was winter, the street was not only dark it

Was crusted with a wintry glove of freezing slush and iron
blocks of frozen debris, unclean along the rolling empty
Streets, dark, unclean, unhealthy, cold, a main street which
once had been the prosperous core of a smaller city, now
A daytime strip of repudiated glitz, romance and business
bound in a corridor of eroded shabbiness which still
Kept the remembrance of its older charm, a few derelicts
slouched against the cold night or staggered from
Doorway to doorway, outcasts possibly like ourselves but destitute,
back then before the homeless filled the streets in numbers
Large enough to constitute a town within a town, against this
deceptive score, the city's enharmonic misery, a new resonance
Sounded in a melting heart, O Lord of my heart, Lord of my life,
I did not know where You were but You knew all along
Where I was and there in all Your majesty You exploded so
inexplicably in my heart, wave after wave of love, Your love,
Beloved Lord, Father of supreme protection, without Your grace who
knows what dark laneways my life might have drifted through,
Who knows what closed doorway I might have lingered in, but You
knew where I was all along, You came to this spiraling dot, this
Homeless fleck of dust in a great crescendo of love, a wall of
flame which burned my house to the ground and made that deep
Winter outrageous summer, love for those few stragglers on
the street swept through this cage of my life transforming both
Perception and capacity, I knew what I had not known before,
love for total strangers on that scale could mean one thing
Only, pointless to deny the existence of absolutes now, not with that
new frequency, the song of creation itself singing in the summer fire,
If absolutes existed then the Absolute must also exist, but I

was not ready for that, the mind is so retarded, so late in
Its recognition, yet it does find out sooner or later, the last
kid on the block to know, but eventually it knows, it knows.

There was a time I went running after You my Lord, there
was a time I thought, all those churches must mean something,
And clearly Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky knew a thing or two,
so I looked in what seemed to be logical places, one snowy
Christmas Eve at a Catholic mass, but all I heard was coins
rattling in the collection plates, a little intoxicated yes, along
With many others, but nothing was happening there, and then
the Anglican churches, so beautifully decorated in honor of their
God, so fragrant some with incense from the gushing censer, and
still no one seemed to be home there either, no one who knew, they
All talked, some quite nicely but it was all talk, no one knew
there or among the Methodists and Presbyterians, the Unitarians
Or the Baptists, no one actually knew You my God, they were
rich in doctrine and poor in You my Father, no one seemed
To know who You really are even though You chased after
us generation after generation, sending prophets, saints and
Messengers to set the house on fire, they did not seem to know
who You are my gracious Lord, they did not seem to know
Who You are. It never occurred to me to look inside
the synagogues, my own father's derisive comments had sealed
Their doors when I was still a child, a Jewish child growing
up in an alien world, separate even from the heart of our
Otherness, and so I sought my refuge in philosophy and poetry where
at least questions could be found although the answers were
Clearly being handed out somewhere else because you see, I

wanted to know, more than anything I wanted to know, that
Was the thread on which the beads of my life had been strung,
that was what preserved my life while threatening to destroy
It at the same time, the longing to know coupled with a vague
recognition that a good idea was not enough; unless a good
Idea is ratified in the divine flame, the grace and wisdom to
be found at the source alone, the *qutbiyyat* which is the
Divine explanation of pure grace and light, ideas will quietly
float away when they seem irrelevant, inconvenient, inappropriate,
They will not stay around to bind you to the truth; and there
was a point, a true remembrance given to me when I was
Still a child, when my life was counted in months, less than
a year-and-a-half, something was given to me I kept stored
Away in the pure chambers of my heart, something I would not
begin to understand for years, O the sorrow of those years
When I did not understand my Lord, the sadness in a
life without the fixed point, the light which illuminates
The darkness of universes, galaxies, O my pure Father
who is Lord of all that exists in space and time and
All that does not, O my loving Father who waited for me,
patience without end, compassion without limit, love
Lingering on in the silence of years, O Father, O fiery
jewel sealed in a solemn place waiting for the luminous
Muhaiyaddeen to bring it out, shine it, polish it, make it
known as the buried treasure brought forth and made visible, O
Father all those years ago You made Yourself known to a small
child standing in a springtime doorway bathed in Your light,
Your presence which I did not understand but kept with Your
grace until the years themselves dressed me in robes that knew

At last what had to be realized, what had to manifest as light
in a dark house, the true note against which every other
Resonating sound was tested. Such a test, another in the brief
intimations given with a revelatory smack to wake me up,
Make me pay attention to the truth unfolding within now in
spite of myself, every wrong turning, wrong action or thought,
Such a test came oddly set against the score of Brahms'
Piano Quintet, seeking the wild, gypsy notes of its complex
Origins, and set also against a dose of niacinamide calculated
to invoke sanity; just as the notes soared to the peak of
Their dissonant harmonies along routes which practice had made so
familiar an unfamiliar switch opened a path of inner illumination
Clarifying a dark place, and a certain intrepid urgency led me to
interrupt the blazing score, commentary that could not be contained
Because an event marking the beginning of self-recognition had
occurred, but I could only say that a comet had coursed
Through the inner landscape lighting up places never examined
before, I could only say the person I was inwardly seemed quite
Different from the show presented outwardly, the tough outer shell
had a melting inner core no one had been allowed to see even
Though it surprised me to understand, like a thunderbolt from
the heavens, no one, not my family, not my friends, not
My love knew it was there, nevertheless I assumed they knew,
I assumed I knew when clearly I had not, a simple enough
Truth, I was not what I appeared to be not even to myself, why it
should have been so critical that I didn't know what I
Knew, that I thought who I truly was would somehow be clear
to everyone although not to myself, why this rather ordinary
Observation should arrive in the garments worn by revelation

is hard to say to this day, perhaps it was nothing more than a first
Indication how long the journey would be, how far I had to go and
how long it would take to travel where light had never
Shone before. O my God, Allah, how could I exist here without
Your purity, would I ever have survived the wilderness of blind
Philosophy and bemused religion or the obsessions of doctrine if You
had not called my name again and again, until at last
Your sound reached my heart from that inner ear which knows
how to hear what must be heard, what must be said, O
My Beloved You took the strings of my life and tuned it to
the note I listened for, You showed the body which was
Nothing more than pure light to the inner eye that sees what
must be seen and You gave the taste of Your sweetness to
The inner tongue which tastes only the honeyed grace, Your bliss;
now take me through this summer's *tariqat* to my grave, my
End, the extinction of who I will not be, take me to the end of
the world, the summer's fire all desire which lingers through
This exhausting noon even as the late August light slowly starts
to shrink at both ends and the choir of buzzing cicadas
Claims the day and the night in ringing crescendos, a pure
circumference of sound, a persistent remembrance, the *dhikr*
That moves from outer to inner automatically beating with
the heart, a perfect rhythm of Your love, Your *ahad,*
One, unique, alone, a mystery which has no explanation, You
are, I am not, this is the path of annihilation in Your
Love where the body that swims in the ocean of light is lost
in light, lost in One, gone, gone, only You exist, only You.

Now the rhythms of my life are no longer tied to season-

al drifts, there is no longer that arching sense of loss
As summer sings its closing notes, what difference can the
clock or the calendar make to a body which has no place
In time my Lord, master of the pure heart, Lord of the timeless
place, the heart where wisdom grows through faith in the open
Space of light, what difference to the body's symphony can the outer
season make when the inner realm hears nothing except Your voice
And looks for nothing except Your presence, the beauty of Your presence,
totality obliterating all, what season tied to the earth or air, to fire
Or water, what season of illusion can tamper with visions of Your
silent reality if the body subsists in You? If these stations in
The body which worship fire, the sun, the corrupting points of
anger and hunger which consume understanding in flashpoints
That devour conscience, truth and justice, if their fires are
controlled in this midday prayer our path is cleared, O my
Loving Father sweep this path clear for me, let me not be dis-
tracted or diverted by calamitous attacks from states or
Thoughts or dreams I have already laid to rest, let me keep
moving in a straight, pure line to You, save me I beg You
From wanting anything but You, when ambition fires up or
the petty requirements of ego disguised as something worthwhile,
Even noble and desirable, when they rekindle old longings, old loves,
stamp out these fires for me, let me not be seduced by some pretty
Passacaglia, the base note, the lower voice dominating the upper,
let the only voice I long to hear be Yours my Lord, then I
Can stay unswervingly on this path, this love for all living things
equally, serving only You in my life, my prayer, my words.
There is another thing to tell, two visions illuminating the beads
along those earlier days, the first one of the prophet Jesus on

Good Friday one year when I was all alone, living in a
converted church in mid-western Ontario, a little
Hamlet hardly more than a crossroads called Damascus, sometimes
the setting is the drama itself, somewhere between reading and
Contemplation as I tried to grapple with the true nature of
the self and the implications in selflessness I glanced up at
A wall of books before me and there was Jesus himself,
resplendent in biblical robes, long reddish brown hair flowing
Over his shoulders, a penetrating light from his eyes staring
right into mine, I blinked deliberately to see if he would dis-
Appear, but he remained looking at me seriously while I could not
suppress the reflex thought, a vision of Jesus, why should he
Present himself in terms of calendar art? He ignored my irreverence
studying me with such love, such immobilizing compassion
My breathing seemed suspended on his gaze until finally
with a slight gesture, his right hand moving gently, he
Spoke briefly, only a few words that rang through every
level of inner and outer consciousness, "Be me," he said,
"Don't be like me, be me," again the melting, tender look mani-
festing pure love as his image began to fade and I blinked
Urgently once or twice trying to keep him there, slow down his
disappearance, but the image, the vision ended soon after a
Fleeting resurgence leaving me in a wash of bliss and longing,
Jesus is indeed the soul. The second vision, although
Actually first in time, was not so easy to account for, it
would be several years until I recognized the contents
And found a context for its radiant suppositions: when I
looked at a mirror on the wall I saw a lamp, like an
Old-fashioned oil lamp, hanging from three chains in a recess

or niche in the wall, it was unlit but not in darkness,
Hanging there, a symbol for the explanation to come when
that lamp would be lit as a transcendent image of light
Upon light whose divinity is beyond reason or doubt, whose
essence, the sacred oil which lights the lamp is held in
Trust for us all; may that lamp be lit for us all my Lord,
may we understand the meaning of the lamp, the light and
The oil, show us that niche, the place in our hearts where we
turn towards You, where we face Your direction and listen
To Your sound, Your voice alone, where we see only You. Now clear
the path for us my Lord, teach us how to recite this prayer
Here as the fires of summer subside, then we can make ourselves
ready for the next, learn what we have to learn, do what we have
To do, finish everything appropriate to this blazing time of prayer
while the grass is green and rich, the trees blow their perfect
Harmonies and the birds descant in happy colloquies, then we can
extract the thorns from our garden, tame the wild profusion that
Grew every which way in spite of our best efforts to make it bloom
within the bounds of beauty unbound by purest love, this garden
Which is our life, this grace which is our life, this truth which is
not only our right, our responsibility as well to claim; before
The sun sets and before this summer ends we must reclaim what
was given to us in trust, restore the garden to its original
State when flowers of every size and color grew happily side by
side and the weeds which were nothing other than the selfish
Absorptions of ego and desire could be easily removed, while we
learned to distinguish the path leading to the heart, to the tiny
Point of perfection lost among the thorns. As the summer's season
comes to an end in these early September days and sudden storms

Blow up fiercely off the coast, we beg You beloved Father who
kept us safe in the fires which burned the house down,
Keep us safe when the waves build higher and higher, save us
from water and wind, from gales that ravage the shore,
Take us from *waqt* to *waqt* wrapped in remembrance of You.

'ASR

The Late Afternoon Prayer

By late afternoon if you haven't seen what the day means,
if you haven't yet learned to turn to that exalted
Lord who is our God and come to some understanding about this

World and the next, if you have still to hear the sweet songs
sung by the soul to the One who is totality, the sum of
Everything in existence, and you keep the gates locked up tight

Against the truth you could be in danger of losing it, losing
altogether the meaning of birth and death, meaning and
The consequence of meaning, you might have missed your chance

To live in the reality itself, this endless shower of pure light
illuminating each thing you need to see and know; by late
Afternoon if you keep searching for trumpets of color, ignoring

They are nothing more than proclamations of the death
to come, how will you see your own soul, how will
You know the great purity invested in your own soul, how will

You come to the life of the soul which exists in light alone
if you have not given up our life of the body in this world,
Have not seen the snares set just behind that intoxicating beauty

Of sunrise and sunset or the sweet seduction in an aching desert
suddenly alive with tender flowers or the barren splendor
Of curving mountains etched in snow beside the quiet shore, all

These outer signs so exquisite in themselves are not really
the point, merely the in- dicators of an inner point we
Must seek with every breath, discarding ephemeral mountains,

Deserts that come and go or flowers that die before they bloom
for the unfading, the changeless permanence, One without
Beginning or end. By late afternoon we must set our feet on the

Deathless path, a path of truth, the *haqiqat* which has already
translated words or thoughts into acts, the inextinguishable
Good bathed in our blissful certainty and the knowledge, the clear

Wisdom which ratifies this certainty, a choral unison, the purest
voices ascending from note to note in a single resonance which
Speaks only of One, an unbroken remembrance of God tuned by God

Alone to God alone, O my dearest Lord, Allah, keep me here in this
body of light which bathes in light, the presence swimming
Through the ocean of Your presence in the heart, love, patience,

Tolerance and compassionate mercy without limit, keep me among them,
their purity and grace- ful nobility our expression of You and
Your expression of us beloved Lord; at this *waqt,* this time of prayer, let

Me be raised up in wisdom's realms through the region where our
bodies define that love Jesus defined so purely,
Of all the prophets sent he was the perfect understanding of love

And he is so loved for this, dearest Lord make the resonance
of Your truth the only song I care to sing and make
My heart expand enough to hold Your mysteries, the secrets

Which unfold and the mysteries which remain, close my eyes
to any sight but Yours and lock my ears against any
Sound but Yours, this life of the soul has its own borders and

Boundaries built right into that inner chamber, a silence of
its own where light is the only sound and light is the only
Word. Out there where seasons flourish and time still has a tale

To tell hurricanes come in unparalleled succession, one by
one they beat upon the shores of presumption, reminding
Us, like fires that rage in our forests out west, where the radiance,

The power and majesty are truly to be found, not in ourselves, not
in the things we do, not in the things we make or destroy,
Not there or anywhere but in You beloved Lord even as we watch

The seasons come and go so rapidly, with one breath it is summer
then a cool wind blows across the night and with the next
Breath the dogwood leaves have half turned red, it is autumn

And leaves which towered in tall green columns begin to show
their soft silver under sides as they start to dry and curl
In shorter days and less forgiving nights, O my Lord who is beyond

Season, who is without day and night, let me not be lost in mourning for
a season's passing when the only passage I crave is out of
Time or season or change into Your permanence which alone

Exists, which alone remains; so when hurricanes howl their
deadly hymns keep me safe in the body of a whale, when
Fires scorch searing circles all around grant me Abraham's gift

To be Your friend, let me know that You will make the flames feel
like fresh water on my skin because my trust is absolute,
Nothing exists but You and You are Allah, the totality in whom

I disappear, the patience, contentment, trust and praise of You, the love,
the mercy, justice, the fragrant tolerance, compassion and peace,
The forgiveness, grace and nobility of Your divinity, the wisdom born

Of perfect faith which ignites this truth, and so the song is sung, a single
note in tune whose resonance spreads before the beginning
To beyond the end, whose purity is the great ocean of light where all Your

Qualities live, where I must die to live, now see me come my Lord
and let me in, open Your gates where I have knocked and
Prayed so long, open the door wide and let me sit at the foot

Of Your throne with those sanctified beings who circle there
singing Your praise, let me be lost in Your love and service
To You until my days have no night and I am free at last,

Free of the ups and downs which make up all the illusory joys
and sorrows we delude ourselves with in this
Flagrant world which has neither the gift nor the wisdom to know,

To distinguish what happiness means, what happiness actually is in
the face of every mortal and continuing obsession, attachment to
Whatever we think we are, whatever we think we want, whatever

We have, whatever we do not have, whatever we think will
satisfy the insatiable, the longing for something we
Cannot identify, cannot locate, cannot recognize, whatever

We hold tight to our chest, playing each hand with a perverse
assumption the cards are stacked against us when the
Opposite is true and will always be true if we know the source,

If we know the meaning. So let the world go, that is a way to begin,
the first step on a road which began in the realm of
Souls and ends in a world beyond death, you have to let the world

Go to find the way, that fine line no more than the seventh part
of a hair in width yet so clearly marked, lit up by signs and symbols
If you know where to look, if you open your heart and search in-

Wardly with conviction, expecting, believing, knowing that guidance will come,
will be given, if you search for someone who has gone
This way before you, someone holding high a lamp lit by truth and

Fired in the flames of divine wisdom will find you, explaining where
and how to go, teaching you to read the inner book which is
An account of your life, teaching you your secrets and God's

Secrets, teaching how it began, how it will end and what happens
after the end, such a radiant story filled with bliss, filled
With light will be yours, so let the world go, that is a way to begin,

Turn your back to the world and your face towards God, then He
will turn towards you on His great throne, He will
Reach from His exalted place to yours filling your life, an

Indescribable sweetness unlike any other you might have known;
when it's late afternoon and the subtle grey sky has massed
Layers of darkening clouds, when the first few dry leaves are blown

By quickening winds in sudden gusts across the road, think about
what you know, what you can be certain about, understand this
Day will end soon enough as you watch it hurtling down to an

Evening which is already foreshortened by heavy skies and diminishing light,
understand it is time to have found out a thing or two, time to
Have seen the great tide of inner light which holds the treasures we

Seek, here is the place where prayer makes a shore, here is peace
born of peace and truth, born of truth living by light alone.
In this autumn of grace when some days still have the remembrance of

Summer, an easier more spontaneous time, you might already know how
to turn back certain worldly tides which pull you this way and
That, away from the sweet shores marked out by this wisdom we urgently

Seek, you have learned to put away the anger, the haste, the restless
envy and grieving pride, you have learned the slow retraction, step
By step, of the small and large deceptions, the distractions and even those

Small irritations that throw us off balance and seduce us from the point,
the focus, you have learned the careful patience and pointed
Gratitude, the surrender and praise of God which are like jeweled

Swords, weapons in the battle against yourself, these attributes that grew
recklessly in the early morning sun and now are easily seen as
Disfigurements, not the prizes you first took them for, you have seen

That greed and jealousy, hatred and especially arrogance are boulders
on the path, they must be chipped away, reduced little by little
Until they are rocks or pebbles then mere particles of dust to be

Flicked away, swept easily from the fine line you have resolved
to walk, and you have mastered the secret of the two breaths,
The purifying exhalation which drops the left, individuated self, desire

And all that is not Allah, and the right, the inhalation which is nothing
but Allah, you have learned to set aside the body and the envelopes
Of the body, the spirituality which culminates in high purpose and lofty

Sentiment but arrests our search for the supreme goal, the longing which
can end in You alone beloved Lord, You alone. Because
There is a truth which must be known directly through the ordinary as

Well as in the most exalted states, I keep thinking of a time when
difficulty and danger envel- oped us, not myself alone but
Thousands and thousands, when the great hurricane came which killed

Many and destroyed so much, yet there are other things that must first
be told as we slowly slide through warmer days at Septermber's
End, studying the leaves right on top of the maples, so much rain

This year everything seems reluctant to change, everything has
stayed green, disinclined to move through the natural process
Which precedes the finality ahead, and yet we are required to know

The pain at the beginning and at the end, we are obliged to find out
where we came from, know what lies beyond the end and what
We have come to do between these two poles defining the body's presence

Here, we have to start with this understanding, what it means to be born
a human being, man, wo- man or child, we have to learn that
The essence of our humanness is our divinity and the essence of our

Divinity is our humanness because God is within us and we are
within God; as that ex- quisite truth begins to resound through
Our lives we have no choice but to turn away from the world,

In fact the world turns away from us faster than we can turn away from
it, to those still caught up in the drama, the acts, the needs and
Longings of the world we seem rather bizarre, they tend to leave us alone

And we notice everything falling away on its own, an involuntary, quite
natural seclusion fills our days and erases the nights
Effortlessly while we are lost in bliss, in love with our God, in love with

His love, His prayers, His perfection, His radiant presence permeating
each breath, each pore in luminous grace, a strength magnifying
Our thoughts, our words and acts with His majestic light. Where once

We found ourselves enmeshed in dark shadows, the terrifying woods
of our lives, we are now in an open park, a soft pasture of rolling
Hills and paradisal peace, the sadness and crushing sorrows of the past

Obliterated in pure light, a matchless peace unimagined before, then with
this taste of paradise to refresh our fatigue, to inspire us with
Visions of what lies ahead we realize that even paradise itself must

Drop away to become one with One and the work begins, how is it
possible to explain what this work entails, how is it possible
To describe the interior wreckage which must be cleared without self-

Righteousness or the sanctimonious false confidence that can mar the truth,
the process itself, without any sense of self or satisfaction, just the
Quiet seriousness and trust in God, the sincerity and conviction

That He will show us what we need to see and orchestrate our practice
as wisdom grows and those qualities, those attributes of Allah through
Which alone He can be known take root while the things which

Separate us from Him begin to move away, the anger, the haste, the jealous
petulance and ego driven desires, the attachments which blind our
Justice and equality, all this begins to subside, and Allah is so

Merciful He screens the years from our sight, the years it takes to
make the garden grow even though we never abandon the possibility
That instantaneous enlightenment can be ours. By late afternoon as

Suddenly as it's October and the trees begin to flash streaks of orange,
plumes of gold and yellow we have come to that place
Where truth aligns itself with truth in the great ocean of truth,

Where His attributes are known as living entities, actualities, beings
beloved Lord to greet, to meet and merge with on that fine,
Pure line where only One can walk and only You exist, joy and sorrow,

Triumph and despair, heaven and hell all vanquished in ascension,
straight in and up without stages or states or gradations in
Accomplishment, diagrams which analyze and name all transformed

By light, in light, with light, nothing but the very first small
serpentine pile of leaves in the driveway to pull us back with
The blinding remembrance how easy it is, until the very last small

Breath, how easy it is to lose it altogether, everything, wisdom, love
and truth perilous treasures so readily swept away by
Inattention, casual focus, the accident available on every breath,

Diversions disguised as duty, the echo of faded pleasures born
again, resurrected against all expectation, the old songs sung to
A new tune, a reckless syncopation oblivious to the contrapuntal

Line bathed in the duality we have to deal with once again,
ignorant of the one true note, the *a cappella* unison which rings
And rings in solitude alone beloved master, Lord of all the worlds,

You who are my goal and my guide, and if we have come to that place
of *haqiqat* by late after- noon, to the place in the body where
The heart reigns supreme we will know that point of love which

Radiates from the essence, the love of an open heart dissolved in Your
grace and Your kingdom, the love which rules the most unruly.
O go at once when the air is fine and cool, the sun still has a certain

Warmth, it is not too late, leave everything and go, this is the only journey
we ever need to take, nothing about it is simple, nothing about it
Is easy yet it is never tedious, never less than filled with consuming

Conviction and joy, the recovery, the discovery, the fierce reclamation
of who and what we are, the recollection that bypasses centuries
When the search for reasons, answers, the truth itself merely pointed in

The wrong direction, like my own search which followed every dark route
leading nowhere in the end but to confusion or discontent or both
Until my gracious Lord, as He will for every seeker who is sincere and

Unwaveringly dedicated to knowing, understanding, until He took my
heart in His hand and brought me to a tiny man who embodied
The great flame of wisdom for this age, the voice articulated by God,

Inspired by God, inseparable from God, a tiny man drenched in all
knowledge, immaculate in purity, sanctified in the presence of God,
A perfected man who taught the perfectability of man, the great sheikh,

The guru, the teacher or master, whatever name we choose will serve
because he would not let us tie him down to any group or
Cause, he rose above the differences in perspective or points of view,

He soared beyond my race or yours, my language or yours, my religion
or yours to the heart, to the essence alive in His grace, His
Mercy, His compassion, His love, His truth, reminding us always

That God Himself has never established a religion nor has any one of
the legion of prophets He sent done anything except repeat what
God has said, it is we ourselves, compounding incapacity with our

Own mystifying confusion who have sought the consolidation of formless
truth in institutions which prod and preach and proselytize,
Insistent upon their way, their thought, their doctrine, everything we

Have to abandon in the grave no matter how fervently we have been
attached to our ancestry, our geography, our ethnicity, our skin,
What use will our beloved Lord have for any of that? He sees us as

One family, O go then, go at once as the leaves begin to fall on
wet October streets and the nights grow long, the air becomes
Cool then cold and honking geese fly away, think about the day

Of your life which has all too short a lease and go, look for
someone wise, someone who has walked that difficult, fine
Line and knows where it goes, look for someone who makes no

Proclamations, promises only to point the way if you are ready, if
you are willing to go, the truth has been available everywhere,
To everyone, but it doesn't come for nothing, there is a price to pay,

It costs the world, it costs everything that pulls you into the shadows
away from the sun, yet those who choose to walk this way all
Willingly pay, the longing, the urgent striving to be with God making anything

Else irrelevant, of no consequence as the secrets which are no longer
secrets are told and light of the divine explanation wraps you in
The radiant bliss of the soul. In the years of study on our own

We said to each other, now all these books we've been reading say
the teacher will find you when you are ready, and we diligently
Made ourselves available to those who purported to be wise, a

Surprising number passing through town, others deliberately sought out
on travels here and there, sometimes impressed, sometimes let down,
Still, since no one among them said come with me, we knew the sage,

The luminous explainer was yet to be found and we searched on, de-
vising meditations and practices from the works we read,
Undeterred by his physical absence, persuaded we were doing what

Was necessary, until one day when things were not going well I
announced with the sort of determination born in despair that
I would set off by myself in search of the elusive guru because

He clearly was not finding me, "California," I said, "All these teachers
abound on the west coast, that's where I'll go at the end of this
Year, as soon as we finish our obligations here, I'll go there

And visit them all at the end of December." At the end of November
my sheikh came to find me, five days I still celebrate
As the anniversary of my coming to God, a miraculous intersection of

The human and the divine when the gates of paradise were opened wide
and I was welcomed in, not for any act of mine I think, not
For anything I ever did or thought except the longing to know,

A fine thread that held all the uneven beads of my life together no
matter how it seemed even to myself, so if God has put
This need in your heart, listen, hear it and go, follow the pure path

Which begins in the world of souls and ends in the transcendence
beyond death, then by late afternoon you might come to the
Unexpected warmth, days of Indian summer when the sun rekindles

Itself for a few gracious hours at a time, you might come to that
place on the path called *haqiqat* where truth is so deeply
Embedded in truth and form is so deeply embedded in the

Formless it disappears altogether, light defining what is no longer
there, and You alone exist beloved Lord, the *haqq,* the reality,
The truth which shelters everything, the essence and the totality.

By late afternoon you might come here if you have learned what
giving up the world really means, not just the obvious things,
The ambition attached to work and house and friend, things and people

Themselves, the small things as well, those tokens of a thought or some
emotion invested in the tiny articles we surround ourselves with,
Afraid to let them go because they represent the things of the world

We claim as our own in private ways we alone will recognize,
whether it's a pillow, a mat or a ring we have to let it go
To be free, whatever we want of the world keeps us there, ties us down,

Whatever we cannot relinquish is the size of the world for us, the size
of the burden we carry on our backs to the grave; think about
This as October peaks in streaks of orange and red and the dogwood

Leaves have turned magenta, think about this as certain birds have
already slipped silently away from trees whose upturned
Leaves are crisped and dry in a few deceptive hours of warmth

And sun, because the most extraordinary secret which is no secret at
all in this realm of truth crowned in truth is that we have to
Give up wanting anything, everything, even wanting itself, the truth

Made clear to us most beloved, supreme Lord of our warming days
and fragrant nights is the need to give up wanting even You, we
Must know the inner patience, the absolute gratitude and surrender to You,

The totality of finding praise to You in every good or bad which fills
our life and give up the hunger, the longing of the soul to be lost
In You because desire of any kind, even for You beloved Lord distracts

Us, becomes an interest we have to look after instead of dissolving
in Your protection, Your grace, Your praise, Your love. Our
Brief moments of reprieve disappear as the days grow dark and wet again

And the first small shower of brown oak leaves blows across
the drive, so our days are numbered and so they fall, yet since
I've learned a certain equilibrium in Your grace, avoiding the ups and

Downs, the highs and lows in a continuum where it pleases my Lord to
allow tranquillity to reign, a coolness replacing the fevers of another
Time, I accept each change with willing fondness and the clarity to bear

Whatever lies beyond, a clarity planted deliberately in me how many years
ago by my beloved sheikh who was the master of certain inner
Controls, switches inside me it seemed, how else could those instantaneous

Transformations be accounted for, take that day for example when he taught
what *in sha' Allah,* God willing, really means, it was not as if
I had not known who had the final say in my comings and goings, it was

Not as if I had not made specific attempts to stand back from my
own plans, my own efforts to see how God determined consequence,
And yet I did not know in an inner way, at the core, the center,

The operational place where assumption presides did not really know what
it means to surrender the outcome to God alone until the day
I said to my great sheikh, almost casual in my confident assertion, I

Expected to meet him in Ceylon, the home he was soon returning to, early
in the winter and he, with- out missing a beat looked me straight in
The eye saying firmly, directly, launching an arrow with his words that

Penetrated deep within the place which had not understood, you must
always say *in sha'Allah* when you say something like that. From
This I understood two things, first, that in spite of my expectations I

Would somehow not be going to Ceylon, and second, I had to revise my
inner catalogues of how and when, paradigms of privilege and
Preoccupation, something it turns out which takes a long time to

Do, a hard point to refine yet a primary condition of faith, what he
taught was all about faith, everything flows out of this,
Wisdom, grace, truth, the subtle reparation of all that turns away,

Moves towards the world instead of towards the Beloved, our Lord,
difficult to redefine what we have scrupulously assembled
As the articles of lucid thought and cogent reasoning but all that has

To be reassigned, sometimes abandoned altogether, subsumed sometimes
as subordinate particles in a process which streams directly out
Of the mystery itself, the illumination, the revelation at the source,

Truth, the reality a scent like dew soaked apples fresh from
the farm, experience con- verging in this late October warmth
To ratify what cannot be denied along the path which leads only

To You, bypassing the brilliant, winding banks of the Schulkill where
the water lies high and trees exult in decadent flames of
Gold and red and orange, reminding us that all paths except Yours

Take us to the grave my Lord, each thought and act which does
not begin in You and end in You takes us only to a
Shallow grave where all the hollow treasures must be dumped, whether

It's a thing, a person or a thought the grave makes everything
except our good and our bad equally irrelevant, equally porous
Clay, so turn to the path defined by love and lit by wisdom, turn

Inwardly to that place where loving each other is not a concept
but a constant, where the time frame we impose on love is
Transformed by a pure leap into the unconditional, instead of taking

Twenty years to love the casual stranger who crosses our path from
time to time we confer instantaneous love that knows and
Forgives, love that indulges, sees no differences, automatically accepting

What this person does as her way, what that person does as his style,
finding no more fault than we would with our own small
Child, knowing this child is merely ignorant, as we were when we

Were very young, before we knew, such ungrudging affection lives
in a palace on the path, an unguarded palace where everyone
Is welcomed in and there are no limits on your stay, so come at once,

They've saved a place for you, here, the inner heart where the only ob-
ligations are love, faith, truth and the wisdom to make this
Known, where the only food served feeds the soul and we live in

Matchless splendor with companions of the Beloved, O my Lord
grant us access to this place of joy, secure our hearts in
Your goodness, Your compassion, Your mercy, Your tolerance and

The purest trust in You, give us the keys to unlock the gate and
open every door, farther and farther in, to the secret palace
We must build here, each of us, build this mosque of the heart where

We prostrate on a prayer mat which covers the world and keeps us
with You. It is now the end of October, at home the trees
Will all be bare but here in a more forgiving zone the leaves

Still cling, O dry and thin, bronzed and burnished in cooling
skies, revealing once again branching networks above and below,
The sculptured art of Your grace beloved Lord, the hand of

Perfection made known in every gesture; surely by late afternoon
surrounded by Your signs we must know at last what has
To die, what lives in us that has to be blown off the tree like dry

Leaves in the wind, the habits, the words, thoughts, acts and emotions
which separate us from You, beloved Lord, the curves in our
Disposition which elide the capacity to bring our faith and truth,

Our wisdom to You beloved Lord, which drown the need to be Your
perfect devotee in a boiling sea of imperfection, the ego, that
Wounded self which howls for attention, the arrogance which champions

The ego, the reckless speed of the mouth which willingly sacrifices
wisdom for a few quick points, the tug of the world percolating
Up in pointless, persistent desires, surely we must know what has to

Die, and it's not as if we will be other than who we are, just a better,
cleaned up version of who we are, persona preserved and laminated
In luminous folds, garments of Your grace grafted to each radiating flower

In a garden whose variety and profusion show the hand of the Master at
work, delighting in new colors, recombining old patterns to double
The petals or mix certain brilliant shades together, a garden beyond season,

Before and after time in a divine world, souls singing as one, reciting
a single note of praise, the pure resonance branching in harmonies to
Engulf all the worlds and fill each heart. This copper colored time

Of transition is drawing to a close with consistent reminders, know
at last what has to die, what must fall from the tree so that it
Will live, think of the criterion we choose to measure our lives and trade

It in if it doesn't take perfectability into account, think when you
stand beside a freshly dug grave of all that will be deposited there, of
How little consequence now to the one who lies newly interred the passions,

The properties, the pleasures and pains in a life sealed up forever, how
much is a good idea worth, or a bad, now that the oak leaves
Have turned red and brown only to be blown in a thick shower

Like snow to the ground where they lie in slowly decomposing heaps,
emblems of our own swift dissolution in the earth where
We are destined to return. Last week I stood beside such a grave

Honoring the father of a friend, a few of us staying behind after the rest
had left praying without any sense of discrepancy or incongruity
Words from the Qur'an, praying for the easy passage of his soul,

A fervent recitation in Arabic for the soul of a man whose glory
in life fifty years ago was gun running for the Hagganah,
Terrorists fighting for a Jewish state, while I, in the curious circle

Of irony circumscribing our affairs had offered my life forty years
later to make peace for the Palestinians, what difference could it
Make now that we had stood on opposite sides of the fence, what does it

Matter where you draw the lines defining your noble ideals here where
the only lines drawn are engraved in the earth, what matters is
The good you do, so choose your criterion carefully, know that the standard

You pick to embody the truth is the truth, be certain you have the right
to be sure what you take as truth is the truth, wisdom alone
Will know, and without absolute faith wisdom will not mature; let me say

It here, one way or another my life has been spent as a student, not
a particularly gifted student in the formal way but dedicated
To finding out from whatever I encountered or sought out, the only

Things of consequence I've learned came from my magnificent sheikh
whose magnanimity in wis- dom was without limit, who
Poured out what he knew in an endless flow, allowing us a

Luxurious slipstream to bathe in his experience, his knowledge of
worlds whose existence we had not even begun to postulate, what
I know and what I say came from a perfected being whose every

Breath was communion with the divine essence he was inseparable
from, it was he who gave us access to oceans of grace and bliss,
Taught us to swim in a sea filled with absolutes whose actions

Became the focus of prayer, the purification of the heart, the palace
where wisdom presides in radiant splendor. Not many will hear
The invitation, not many who hear will accept the invitation, only

Those who long to meet their Lord will answer the summons in
the heart and of them some will turn back, turn aside or
Turn away too soon because the path is long, hard, solitary and stripped

Of rewards like titles or honor or fame, it is a purely private
matter between God and the soul which must be conveyed directly
By a sanctified being who has made the ascent and come back, stays

On here to show others the way, such beings of light are rare, you
might have to search all your life before you begin, but
Know that He invites you to walk His path even as the knives

Of November shower their icy rains upon you, know that home
for the soul is with God alone and once you hear that first
Whisper, the intimations you cannot resist, there will be no peace for you

Until you make this ascent, O my Lord of grace, O my Lord of
compassion, O my Lord of mercy You have quieted the seas
And ended the season of hurricanes just as You extinguished fires

Burning the forests of summer, You showed me the pure light illuminating
my heart with a quiet assur- ance You would not allow this effort
To remain unfulfilled, because You have given everything, why should we

Even think about asking for favors, grants or special dispensations
when You have provided all that we need eons before our birth,
Why should we think whatever we ask will affect what You have

Already given; O Allah You have given everything and take nothing
in return, You are the guide, the model and instructor for
Our thoughts and acts, You teach through every lavish thing placed in

Creation and through its totality, You are not separate, You exist at the
heart, the point of life in every living thing and we exist in You.
Wherever You take us, wherever You want us to be Your presence explodes

In fountains of light illuminating each dark corner where the petulant dis-
affections shrouding our casual laziness hide, where old habits and
Attitudes lie waiting like shadows pursuing the sun in late afternoon,

These calculated interruptions on the path we carve to You, like
a visit home, so strangely intrusive on the life of prayer in mid-
November when I find my barren presumptions about the trees all

False, leaves still wait on the trees for a final cold wind to snap
them off, catch them in a swirling updraft until they cruise
Down to the ground in brittle heaps of yellow and brown, while signs

Of Your presence pursue me coming and going, the albino deer who
stood like a white marble statue in the sun; why, I wondered, did
They not bother to paint him, and then he moved his neck slowly, he is Yours

I thought, not ours, Your artistry alone could produce such pure form and
grace. Returning by train I watched the copper forest floors for
Life not disturbed by the mourning whistle or rude, crashing wheels

And found little until in a heavily flooded wood I saw a huge, quite
marvellous buck flying away from the path of the train in arcs
So perfect he seemed not to touch the ground at all, his body

Drenched in water, his spirit soaring incandescent in flight, and Yours
the thought came again, Yours not ours. Back here once more,
Piecing together the broken line of beads, the prayer which persists

On a thread of its own, I come to the waiting pool where light
alone penetrates light and intersects with light, here where we have
Chosen to live, to work and pray, realizing the mystery, pushing back

The boundaries to the unknown like the solitary buck leaping in arcs
defined by absolute trust, a radiant affirmation that God alone
Sustains us all whether we choose to live in search of Him or not,

Whether we know He exists or not, whether we care or not, He is
the source, the origin, the goal and the endless end, O my
Lord of mystery and revelation, O my Lord of pure and endless light

Protect our lives, protect our prayers which are our perfect clothes, do
not, I beg You beloved Allah, do not let us be stripped of
The protecting garments of prayer, keep us fully clothed in Your grace

And wisdom, do not let a passing stranger or a passing whim flick off
the cloaks we wear to keep us hidden, keep us small, unnoticed
And inconspicuous in the seething world and do not let old longings

Of the world and for the world creep beneath the words we wear as
guardians for our hearts or slip into the silent folds where we
Manage a few good things, keep us close and let our words shine in Your

Luminous remembrance deep within the place where the only happiness
is knowing You, being with You on every breath so that the sudden
Death of impatiens and roses in the night's hard, killing frost

Is accepted as part of the out there time frame which does not
touch the frame that has no time, there where You ignite the
Blaze of love and compassion, of mercy and tolerance, of truth and justice

With the unconditional wisdom which knows before knowing, which
knows the knower who is the keeper of the flame. Now as our
Day begins to decline in the cold thin light of a chilled late afternoon

And we await what lies ahead, remember there is not much to choose
between the happiness and the sorrow born of things which belong
To the world, they come and they go, they rise and then disappear

As insubstantial emotions without relevance to truth and the ardent
need to be with You, there is a new definition to acquire,
A different kind of happiness, we can call it that only to identify

What it is because it is so unlike the other and because there is no
word to describe a subtle interfusion of peace, rapture and
Indifference to anything but You, the whole world slips away, life

And death are on an equal plane, your specific requirements dissolve
in the certainty that God alone exists and God alone subsists, it
Is His concern to keep you here or take you back as the thundering

Duality which absorbs our days and vanquishes our nights disappears
in the single omnipresent reality. O Allah to live in this
State, in Your undiminishing presence is the transcendent grace some live

In all their days and some at least taste; when the great hurricane came You
wrapped me in Your love for days, showing me what to do in each
Uncertain moment of crisis or confusion, of danger or indecision, making it

Quite clear how safe it would be whether the outcome was life or death,
keeping me in a state that can be described as the happiness of
Your existent reality and my total obliteration, go here You said and the

Way opened, stay here You said and a place was made, there was no fear,
no sense of danger even when the vagrant wind made it sound as though
The sky had split in half and the two sides were grinding against

Each other, then later when there was nothing more for me to do,
go home You said and found someone to drive me from the scenes
Where devastation was all that remained; well beyond the chaos,

The clamor, the destruction, something lifted and I felt You leave,
or perhaps it was the veils which wrap us in our own reality
Winding round me once again or perhaps I had reached the limits

Of a capacity to know, but I had seen what I had seen and
tasted the sweetness I had tasted, even though the sadness in
Your painful absence made me suddenly lost and heavy, O my Lord

Keep me in the secret palace of the heart where You are always to be
found, keep me in the un- divided bliss where seasons split
Open wide their seams and days have no night, let me live only

In You, drenched in Your presence, wrapped in the winds
which whisper Your name alone in each ear, O Allah
Let me disappear forever before this day ends and winter comes.

MAGHRIB

The Evening Prayer

There is a song that is sung at November's end when the sky
is grey and low and the air is mild with
The unfinished business of an easier day, a warmer time
before the leaves began to fall, a song
Sung softly on a few quiet notes as the wind picks up then starts to
blow and rock the tall, slender trees
And send a shower of yellow leaves plummeting down to
certainty at the end of the light and
The end of the day, notes which come from God and return
to Him before death and December begin,
You'll know this song when you hear it because it's not like
any song you've heard before, just as you
Know this day of grace before the night begins, this mild
tempered day which speaks about love,
Forgiveness, tolerance, compassion and truth, each of us must find
these perfectly tuned notes, learn the song
And sing it wherever we happen to be, don't go searching for
the perfect acoustic in a soaring cathedral,
A temple or a mosque, it's awfully hard to hear those notes and
learn the tune in such a place, sing it in the
Clear open space of the heart wherever we happen to be, sing it in
these soft moments, the reprieve, the respite

Before we fall like leaves from the trees, before the moon turns
its cold, impervious face from the sky and the
Wind has teeth to bite and chew and snap, O sing now, sing
these precious notes we have to learn from God
Himself, learn those true notes which are the same as His, be in the
state of One with Him, let the dark shrouds of
Selfhood dissolve and disappear, let each layer that wraps the
screaming I in anger, greed, envy or desire
Be unwound in the grace of a grey and quiet day when the winding
hands of time remind us of the swift, poignant
Passage from *waqt* to *waqt,* never knowing which will be the last,
which will take us from time to eternity where all
That counts is the good or bad we've done. At this brief interval, a
silence between the notes, between the *waqts* as one
Quietly fades into the next, let us rise up through the light to a place
where we live in absolute praise of God no
Matter what comes, no matter where we are, let us look at ourselves
and our lives, look without hesitation and see who
We have become in the wake of who we thought we'd be, see the path we've
cut through the world to this point, find an answer for
The voice which haunts us with the familiarity of a question which plays like
the figured bass through every satisfied desire, through
Acts of consequence and kindness, is this, is this all that it comes to, is this
what it's all about? We've known that voice and known
Its insistent inquiry since we sailed from the shores of childhood onto the open
seas of the world where storms and calm waters
Alternated indiscriminately, sometimes tossing us rudely from calamity to
calamity, sometimes soothing us, lulling us with the
Quietude of an apparently safe harbor until the next ferocious gale blew us

back out to sea and all we could do was hang onto
The tiny inadequate craft, tossed without mercy through the storms of night. If
we come at last to an answer, if we exhaust ourselves
In the seas of repeated experience finally adding up to nothing more than
repetition, if God in His majesty reaches down
From His great throne and puts the answer in our hearts, we still have
to navigate those rough waters but now at least we
Have a map, now at least we have instruments to guide the frail craft
through troubled waters, and now we know where
The responsibility for its safety lies, now we know there is a destination to be
reached, now we know why we have come and what we
Need to do, what we need to learn from every falling leaf and every
freezing moon, now we can begin to abandon our curious
Insistent attachment to the outer world's demands, to the karmic pull of
lineage and my family not yours, to the pleasure seeking
Senses which court the music and drama of our lives in fiction and fantasy,
senses ready to explode in tactile joy and visual bliss,
To race, religion, money, things, science and the preening obsessions of selfhood, to
sports, art and what we unconsciously call entertainment,
To knowledge and learning without wisdom, everything we acquire through channels
disconnected from faith, to the diminishing speculations
Rising through routes of dogma or doctrine, to every precocious paradigm we
taught or learned in pursuit of the paradise where intellect
Reigns for a day and scowls for an age; all this must be launched on its own
sturdy vessel and shipped to distant ports as we set out to
Cross over the fires of the world on a bridge so narrow it is no more than the
seventh part of a hair in width, a bridge which straddles
The tiny gap between focus and obsession, how to put all the concentration we can
squeeze from our life on the point without falling into the sea

Of obsession which lies boiling on the other side, a bridge anchored in the world on this side and eternity on the other, subject to every Passing wind, rocking and swaying in the storms engulfing us as we cross, there are no short cuts, there is no password to guarantee passage or Speed the crossing, there is only the purity of faith and the determination to persist, never turn back, never give up, never be faint-Hearted because when we fling wide the gates of death on a dark December day, O Allah we find You there waiting for us as You Always have, waiting to greet us, an indulgent Father overjoyed at our return. Beloved Father, Lord and supreme guide for our Wandering ways, we see Your face everywhere but when will You allow us to meet face to face, when will You transform the fleeting Bliss of moments in Your presence to that permanent ecstasy when You alone exist and I am gone, when will You let me live there In the inner mosque of the heart where the only sound is the pure note, the praise and devotion to You alone, the only sight the shining brilliance Of Your totality, worlds exploding like stars in Your grace, every sanctified being merged blissfully in Your presence, You my God, my Love, my only master, when?

Now the days are cold and sometimes dark as well, across the road at the convent the trees are Still and solemn in a silence promising new revelations, the first few clotted clusters of wet snow drift down through the rain, Now the leaves are down and the tall trees stand in noiseless vertical lines, from our windows upstairs we can look at those Rolling grounds, see the alabaster statues to Mary the pure, one up close behind the fence and in front of the trees, another way at The back sheltered in a grove, once in a while see a solitary nun in a long cloak

strolling the lengthy path accompanied by two large dogs, see
Also the fourteen birdhouses decorated with small wooden crosses, hoisted
high on slender poles and arranged like stations of the cross, and
The long, low hill sloping down from the house, green but dotted with patches of brown
where remaining leaves congregate in faithful devotion, it is
A time to understand what death is all about, to know that for an interval
of days the gates are open wide when someone dies, someone
We have been deeply connected to in the great stream of love binding hearts,
the gates between two worlds open to let us stand briefly
Here and there at the same time, taste the timeless dimension we once knew
and will know again. At the end of the day when the sun
Has just set in a cloudy, trembling sky the sun of wisdom and the light
of God's truth must illuminate the darkness, by the end of this
Day as the sky grows black with the heavy burden spreading so quickly from
east to west we must know what the darkness really is,
Know how to eliminate the night and live in perpetual light; odd isn't it, that
to understand what life is we have to know what death is,
What dies, who dies then we can know what lives, who lives and we can
approach the death before death which ends all death,
Then we can annihilate every dark shadow which obscures the light, every
thought or impulse or word or act or memory which does not
Come from God and return to Him, every longing or want or need which limits
the gratitude of pure desirelessness, obstructing the path
That is total surrender in praise of You O God, whether we pray five times
or fifty-one times or with every breath, the out-breath
Annihilation of self, the in-breath affirming that You alone exist Allah,
You alone have no beginning and no end, no birth, no
Death, no time, no space, no dimension and still You alone exist, the only
reality, the only truth, the only permanence, the totality

Of everything which is or was or will be; the short day has ended and now
we must transcend the night. With this *waqt,* this time
Of prayer rising to the head, the crown of wisdom, the light of pure
revelation travelling from the head to the heart then
Every part of our body, we meet You beloved Lord in that shining light,
the criterion of Islam, the total surrender to You which
Translates from prostration to exultation, capitulation to the ultimate discovery,
the ascent of the soul to meet You, talk to You, exist in
You, we meet You there at this *waqt* of night and death which becomes
the clear open space on a day bathed in endless light,
Your presence, but how, beloved Lord will we come if You do not reach
down for us, take us through the shining vaults of
The heart, each chamber engraved with a letter which writes
the message passed along from love to truth, our natural
Conduit, how O great Lord, master of my soul, how will we
succeed if the mists of passing imperfections and the
Residual scars made by impurities too deep to slough away persist? We
have been told how easy it is to lose everything
Until the very last breath, how the passion and presumption of
this endless search can come to nothing if we falter, if
We fail to keep our focus finely tuned, how easy it is to lose each
prayer, the posture of prayer, the presence of prayer, the
Precious love which keeps us poised in prostration, the inner and outer
marks of surrender to You when we scarcely begin to
Comprehend the great interior landscape which must be understood inch by
inch, foot by foot, knowing what this surrender entails. Today
A heavy mist folds around the rain, a soft reprieve as we
wait for winter's heavy fist to knock us off our perch,
A mist which hides the convent across the way in vague shadows,

the expectation that what was once there will return,
And as morning grows with light the picture is restored, first
in outline then proliferating detail, O will this
Mist which clouds my view of You be so easily rolled away, will
the darkness dissolve in Your light, will that *mi'raj,*
That ascent of the soul be as easy as the transition from our mosque to
the room of my luminous sheikh where he once sat and taught
And worked, this transportation or transfer which had me in two places at the
same time, something that happened during a long period of
Silent prayer, *dhikr,* the remembrance of God with every breath, when I
stand before You my Lord, will it be like that, will I know
Two worlds at the same time, will I see Your throne again and hear all
the servants of Your majesty sing that note, the purest
Vibration of praise beginning in You and ending in You, will I hear
that note again which I heard before it all began? Day
By day the dark rain falls, day by day I climb up through the darkness
pulling myself up, rising on the ropes of wisdom and light
My gracious sheikh sent spinning across the void separating truth from
ignorance, my perfected master who had permission, license
To reveal certain secrets and document mysteries tightly concealed
by the keepers of wisdom across the eons and ages, mysteries
Which remain because not everything can be told, O Bawa Muhaiyaddeen
help me keep what you conferred, hold my hand and guide
Me still from the inner place of the heart where you reign with
love, help me preserve the stations of prayer you taught
With such exquisite patience, always looking at our light, our good,
encouraging us to deal with the dark humors and
Flickering intention, admonishing us to live the fine, impossible line,
the hair's breadth bridge of light spanning our less

Than admirable ways, O my precious sheikh who gave us a human
embodiment of love, compassion, tolerance and the pure
Wisdom to ignite a passion for justice and truth, take my hand, be
my balance and my pole, my axis, my pivot in the night.

Today the cold has come, the first light frieze of snow lies frozen on
the convent grounds, ice covered sidewalks make it hard
To walk, even the sun after endless dark days has an edge of ice and
feels distant, comfortless, the whole world is cold today, a
Cold which clouds our already astigmatic view of what is valid and
what is not, what exists and what does not, even though
The air is bright and fine and clean we wrap ourselves against
the cold in layers of uncertainty and hesitation when
It is time to discard each garment not spun of pure light, time
to fold ourselves in clarity, time to climb the mountain
To the very top where we can stand in the open space and be with You
at last, speak directly to You and hear Your voice, Your
Speech, the words themselves transforming each molecule in each cell
of our duality until the time out of time when there is
Only One and You alone exist my Lord, You alone exist my Lord.

Days that sloped down to the solstice in an icy
Carapace rise again, now Christmas lies across our path, their solemn
celebration of a prophet's birth shrouded by commerce
And rampant sentiment has always been foreign, what they did while we
only watched, mute in otherness, exclusion, a child
Curious about another child, recognizing the prophet they sought
to claim as their own but without their deification,
Was this deliberate or accidental mischief, was it Paul who should be

held accountable for this misrepresentation? Even as
A child it seemed unlikely to me, with the experience of a child, that some
other soul could do the work for mine, the debts I incur
Must be discharged by me, each soul is uniquely itself, each of us given
the responsibility to return to God what came from God,
Then much later came the stunning confirmation, a story suppressed in
this our western world for two thousand years, God
Took Jesus up to heaven leaving Judas in his place on the cross, He would
not allow His prophet to be tortured, to suffer in that
Way, but who in this enlightened, emancipated, technocratic realm will
have ears for a piece of news like that, and even though
The ecclesiastic authorities have little sway these days, the politics of
business on a global scale, the politics which rule the world
Would have something to say if the grip they have were tampered with by
truth, the truth which is inherently ours and has been coolly
Cast aside for the pleasures of the world, the tasteless acquisition of
money, power and things which can never be piled up
High enough to keep out the night, which can never satisfy the mind
or the heart, the mind because it is programmed to persist
In folly, the self-perpetuating search for the world that cannot come
to rest, the heart because it must pass through the frivolity,
The sentiment, the moods, the attitudes and appalling acts dictated by
the world for the world, pass right through to a point
Which is Your light and Your truth, this alone can give peace to
the longing, yearning heart my God, this alone can give peace
My God, learning what has to be learned, doing what has to be done,
never looking back, never giving up, never doubting, never
For a moment swerving from the path, the point which encompasses
Your truth and wisdom in a dazzling, irrisistible place

So engaging, so absorbing and commanding everything else is obscure,
in shadow, an abstraction of no consequence, about nothing
That matters because we know why we are here, at last we know
why we are here and what we have to do. The claws
Of winter retract again, on a mild and cloudy day with just
a few threads of blue lacing across the sky it seems
Possible the vicious winter beast may be a tame species
after all, and as I look across the convent grounds
Studying the stately firs which seem intensely green against
the paler grass and naked branching trees, something
Reminds me of the diversity we brush against along the path,
how sometimes the things we think will be hard
Are easy and things which promise to be easy are so difficult, how
what we think we want turns out to be wrong
For us and what we try to avoid is what we need, then a soft rain
scatters across the ground for a few moments, ending
In a song briefly sung by birds engaging their own survival, O
Allah there is a simple recognition winding through
These thoughts, a thread which binds everything together in a
burst of returning light, it is all about *alhamdu lillah,*
The praise of You laced in the letters of the heart, the *a, l, m, h, d,*
notes which have learned to sing Your name, the purified
Heart in its original state hidden there beneath the life we've
lived, hidden behind a heavy early morning mist which
Shrouds the ground and keeps the convent house from view, yet it
is there, we know it has not disappeared merely because
It is not to be seen, we know that as we move across the day we will
see what must be seen, but will we do what must be
Done, polish each letter until it shines and sings through the night,

a song which comes from You and ends in You, a night
Which has no name, which is no longer night since only light remains,
will we finish the work on each letter, will we try hard
Enough, pray long enough, sweetly in the right way, heart, breath and
thought focused on You without deviating, focused on
The timeless place where You are to be found my Lord, my God, master
of my life, my destiny and my destination, O Beloved?

This time of prayer comes just as the darkness folds around us,
a heavy cloak in the west, the beginning of night,
The close of the last act right before the final curtain falls,
the resolution and denouement, all the threads of our
Life worked into the ultimate pattern preserving our good and our bad, by
now we must have asked ourselves the right questions and
Rectified any harm or injury we have been responsible for, must know who
we are, what the world means, where the open space
Lies, we must have committed the totality of our existence to the truth
and service to the truth, to You Allah, incomparable
Truth, unique, solitary and complete, One, the fathomless mystery, One,
contemplation without boundaries or lines defining
Beginning and end, One, unimaginable, nothing above and nothing
below, nothing beyond, nothing uncontained, One,
Undefined absolute known through the clear channels defined by
absolute faith, One, everything which exists everywhere,
Whole universes, immensity and invisible electrons, each particle in every
world proclaiming the beauty of Your truth and the
Perfection of who You are, Allah, God, the One we call out to,
the One who answers. This time of prayer draped in
Darkness is the movement from shadow to the open pool of pure

light where we bathe in Your praise and Your bliss,
Leaving behind the alternation of day and night for a persistent
place in light, a place we cannot find without a guide,
Someone who has been there before and knows the way, someone
who is not only wise with the knowledge born in the purest
Faith but is also inseparable from the source itself. This is not
a place you can find without a map, a map that is
Passed directly from hand to hand and you will not know until you
get there whether it is the right one or not, so search for
A perfected being who has nothing to gain and nothing to lose, search for
your guide, your teacher with an open seeking heart,
A master who will not teach from a book, a calendar, a clock or
a curriculum, a master who can re-form the seeking heart, a cell
By cell transformation, a transposition from the human to the divine on
a scale which rises in bliss from seven to eight and
Falls back into six where subsistence is in God alone, beyond form
or body or weight, a light form which prays and
Plays and sings and serves, so find the master whose heart will
be your guide, whose heart submerged in God's own
Light and wisdom will be a magnet for yours; and how will you know,
how will you recognize this true master? Search for
Someone who does not put a price on the truth, whose every act is
a deliberate replication of his words, whose hand will
Take your heart and squeeze it with the revelations you have
sought, whose life itself is an endless stream of love,
Compassion and tolerance, search for someone who lives in oneness with
God Himself, no separation, a seamlessness you can see
And feel directly in his words and acts which are God's own
words and acts; on a night when the sky is dressed in

Versions of midnight blue and laced with clouds of deepest grey
or on a bright cold day after the sun goes down as
The winds sigh in choral unison through tall, stripped pines and
you have the first intimation the year is on the rise
While trees in bending, black lines up the street stand hard
against the diffuse, sinking rim of yellow fire,
Search for the true master whose heart is a resonance of God
sounding quite directly in your own, one note,
One sound, His, which the master sings and dreams and decorates
with his wisdom, explanations addressing
You immediately in the place which craves to know, at the same time
preparing the way for accounts that document a reality
Beyond speculation, beyond the reasoned curves of space or time, the truth
of His existence and His realm whose sanctified beings
Serve the secrets commanding every world. The guru, the teacher,
the exalted sheikh you need has mastered the pure
Voice of *alhamdu lillah,* profoundly, sincerely offering thanks and
praise for the present moment whether it is a gift or
A torment, riches or poverty, food or hunger, sickness or health, life
or death, profoundly, sincerely dedicating each
Moment after this one, each moment which lies ahead to His care and
protection, this teacher will be recognized by the beauty
Radiating from his face and heart, the entrancing beauty of his character,
his disposition, his ways both small and large, by
The noticeable absence of ego and desire, the transforming bliss emanating
from his presence, an unsheltered joy rising in your
Heart merely to sit close by, and most wrenchingly, most tellingly,
a quiet invitation to travel along with him if
You are not sure of the way, no compulsion, no seduction, nothing but

the certain wisdom pointing with clarity at the goal,
If such a person finds you lost on the way, going to the left when
you should have turned to the right, go with him,
Stay with him once you have found your true master, no need to
keep running after mystical experiences, saints or
Holy men, stay with him, study, learn, pray, walk on the slippers
of grace and wisdom he will make for you, stay with
Him as the silent snow begins to fall, a careful blanket on the cold
cold ground covering the pale dead grass and naked
Branching trees with a peaceful shroud of white, stay with him as
the earth closes in against intrusion, clamped up
Tight by the cold, unyielding and unreceptive, yield and receive
the gracious warmth of his truth which melts
The ice and iron night clocking your heart, locking it down
when it longs to fly free, learn the secrets of
The soul, where it was at the beginning and where it will be
beyond the end, learn in the golden slipstream
Of his experience, hold tight through hard cold days when frozen
winds blow snow obscuring your sight, hold
Tight even if he is no longer physically close by, let him guide your heart,
let him speak through your truth to the truth.

The meaning of this time of prayer which we celebrate as light
transforming dark, the pure gnostic light sweeping
Up and sweeping away the residue left behind after the great karmic
clean out, the articles of ego, illusion and desire,
The meaning is revealed in a realization of pure wisdom wiping off
the inner baggage lodged behind the spiritual plane,
The inaccessible keys to the hidden locks, subtle and ambiguous

paradigms like the genetic code we have allowed to
Govern our lives now exposed, defined and superceded, this place
of reckoning and revelation, the inner body of light
Sounding the note of Your praise, *alhamdu lillah* the secret song
sung by every drop of blood, every piece of tissue,
Every nerve is open now, open here, we become luminous, transparent,
a perfected version of what we were and are without
The distortion, without the weight of shadows cast by the forest
of forms we protect and preserve, unacknowledged
Deities determined to perpetuate their reign religiously with
all the doctrine and dogma the hierarchy can devise,
The doctrines of self, the dogmas we impose to sanction each
deviation from the purity required by realms of
Perfect light and praise where there is neither form nor shadow
in the blazing sun of One to whom all praise
Belongs. The absolute faith from which wisdom grows can be
taught, it can be learned with patience and full
Flowering gratitude, it can also be transmitted directly by
a *gnana* sheikh of pure wisdom, transferred from
The heart of his certitude to yours in a towering transmission bypassing
the languorous, learned routes, a cell by cell
Rededication to radiant light, illumination may be instantaneous too;
life with Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, both the slow re-formation,
Like water dropping on stone he once said, and the swift transition
from state to state were fueled by his immediate incision
Of grace, understanding that penetrated the essence in a way which
changed everything forever, as on the day when
Someone I had loved so intimately for years died and I came to my
sheikh for comfort; a trembling column of grief about

To crumble, come down like pillars in an earthquake I stood before him,
he turned his gaze from depthless eyes on mine,
Searching to eradicate the pain with comprehension he looked into me,
concentration, intensity and purity converging in a fine
Transection, *alhamdu lillah* he said staunching the flow of grief, then again
alhamdu lillah he said offering a bridge of light which
Crossed above my pain as the pillar reassembled itself stone by stone and
I took that word, received its point in a place alive
With meaning which had eluded me before, to this day I lean against
that point, live surrounded by that point, illuminated by
That point, to this day even as Arctic winds bind us, huddled heaps hoping
to survive the bitter ice and freezing gales, I live in
The melting love of that praise to Allah no matter what comes, snow,
ice or sorrow, I find that point of praise switched
On within my heart, ignited mysteriously in the pure fire, the wisdom
flowing from a perfected human being whose words
And intention were shaped in the fire of love to God and duty to Him,
to us. The gift he conferred, a bomb exploding certain
Rocky, impenetrable masses in my heart where the inner baggage had
been secured, unperturbed by the grace and wisdom showered
Upon us all, this gift which was to guide me through even darker
moments that lay ahead was given openly, freely, for
Reasons I may never understand, perhaps it was given for no other reason
than I needed it, wanted it, would never have known
How to receive it if I had not been in a state which allowed that
grace to bypass the invisible blockades erected in
A life built on misconception, the siege of reason which won hard battles
culminating in recurring despair without ever
Conceding something was not right, not working out, the triumphal

marches that ended in seasonless grief, all this
Buried debris disguised the origins of programs and attitudes so well
I might never have rooted them out without this
Explosion of light, a season when death was destroyed, fountains of
sunlight spilling joyously everywhere after long, bitter
Nights and short dark days, songs bursting from birds who had
kept their silent vigil during the frigid darkness,
The pure happiness of light falling upon the splintered dark, such were
the gifts of my sheikh, gifts you have an obligation
To offer around like sweets on a tray because once you know,
you know, there's no turning back or turning away.

This state of truth will not be found by examining the manifest
world of forms on the outside or its hidden twin,
Counterparts we keep inside, it will not be found along the way
on any path we choose to walk, outer or inner, nor will
It be revealed in the great purification, the light bath of prayer
crowned with beauty and bliss, it exists at the heart
Of wisdom alone, gnosis, *ma'rifat,* wisdom which must be sought
beyond darkness, beyond death, divine knowledge
Within wisdom itself, meaning, the mystery unlocked, the mercy known,
merging, union, nothing exists but You, You
Are God, the state of One which fills everything and includes
everything, a holy silence in the open space, One,
The unified field defined at last as One, this is what we search for,
this we must know before the night ends and the living
Season called death expires, we must know this. It is only late January
now yet already the honking, hooting cry of the wild
Geese flying north has sounded, a signal as explicit as the sudden

irruption of mild, wet days alternating with dazzling,
Caressing sun, and even though there will be long and difficult times still
to endure, we know the night will end and our life will
Also end, we must learn everything before we go or else God will say
He gave it all to us but what did we do with it, we are
Accountable, if we answer for the things we've done or failed to do before
we go there will be nothing left to ask, we will have
Peace in this world, peace in the grave and beyond; to get to that deathless
state before we die, that state of divine inner
Luminous knowledge is what this time of prayer is all about, to be
in that state is *ma'rifat,* the knowing of knowing, His
Face imprinted on ours by the charity and clarity of pure love, Islam
the surrender of that love to light, living in the circle
Of pure gratitude with our face towards His, understanding that
distress or sorrow can arise only when we forget where
We are, who we are and look somewhere else, that it takes nothing more
than a simple right angle turn to restore the focus,
Knowing we have learned this turn like a violinist adjusting immediately
to the thousandth part of an inch for the note to be
In tune. O God, my God, keep my face always turned towards Yours,
never let me wander from that pure circle of praise to
You and love for You, the love ignited by wisdom and a longing to be
in that place with You which has no place, space
Which has no space, keep me in Your unquenchable state of love, let me
hold onto You with the wisdom and absolute faith seeded
In my heart, nourished and protected by my gracious sheikh; O God,
my God, let that reality which has no roots in form
Or shadows be my truth, those shadows are nothing more than
the teasing duality of the *dunya* where I have never

Been at home, let Your truth be my radiant warmth as we plunge
into the coldest days, the February out there which has
Nothing to do with this inner season of triumphant light rejoicing in
the death of the world, the death of the year,
The death of every obstacle straddling the way to You, the arrogance,
the condescension and ignorance, the failures of love,
Patience and gratitude no matter how minute, all that must die before
the end trembling at last in Your immaculate presence,
The perfection, the complete resolution, totality, One, alone, silent,
solitary, undivided, One, without limit, beyond definition,
The unchanging permanence who is nowhere but there, always there, One.

We come now to the end of this day, our life, in the coldest
Month, my old Montreal grandfather used to say he did not want to die
in February, it was too hard for everyone to stand
Around a grave and mourn, too terrible to grieve on a dark, cold day,
and of course he did die in February, mountains of
Snow stacked on all sides, the unyielding earth like iron and every-
where a ruthless, cold hand, a necklace of death clasped
At the throat, my own father grim and passionless in rimless glasses
beside his father's grave, the father whose disbelief
Filled his life and soured his days—O God be gentle, be merciful
to those who do not know, who choose ignorance, who
Cannot know—we come now to the dark, cold end of time, our
time on earth calculated by months or seasons,
This shortest month a plague of night before the light even when
against all expectation the stubby green fingers of long dormant
Crocuses begin their upward push through newly opened earth. This
wintry beast has been merciful after all, apparently

Disinclined to leave his lair merely to punish or pursue those
who are his victims, the unhealthy, casually weak who
Cannot endure that frosty breath, let us in any case remember what this
freezing night of prayer is all about, the *alhamdu lillah,*
The praise to You for cold or warmth, sickness or health, wealth or poverty,
each state or condition a place of ease, pure happiness if
Our face is turned to You and miserable discomfort if we look away, let us
now master the constant remembrance which never deviates from
Breath to breath and unties the necklace of death in a garland of light,
let us speak to You now with the words You write on
Our hearts, the ecstatic wisdom which knows and speaks, the passage of light
to sound a transition resounding in the fragrant vaults
Where the heart has emptied itself of everything but You, let us now remain
in the perfumed ecstasy of Your love, held there in
This sunlit night by purest illumined wisdom flowing from the conviction,
the certainty, You alone exist, there is nothing but You, I
Am not, you are not, we come and go like transient
flocks of hungry birds pecking the barren ground for
A few sparse particles while You alone have no beginning or end, and
everything, everything in all the worlds is subsumed in
Your existence, has no reality except in You, forms are ephemeral
phantoms of the night, a hyperactive duality controlled
By the grace and wisdom of One, the Absolute, One, the unchanging,
One, the imperishable, in whose hands everything rests,
Who can change our life and our death, who controls but sets
us free to be who we are so that we look for Him
By choice, without compulsion, acknowledging our hunger and our
transience, the perishable longing to return, disappear,
Merge, annihilating selfhood in unicity, the exquisite One. Too terrible

to grieve on a dark, cold day for the brevity and even
The terminability of life in the world, let us instead as we come to
the beginning of night show a face that blazes light
Through the darkness all around, the criterion of wisdom, surrender,
praise and patience, the head and the heart like beacons
On a dark shore oblivious to anything but their own light, the gnostic
flame, the grace filled state of bliss at Your feet,
Five letters translated from the elemental body to the body of all praise,
the heart of *alhamd* written on the face, an inscription
In luminous letters defining a version we can recognize, can also
understand, who it is You are and how You are to be
Known, my Beloved, my Lord who is the master of my life and
breath, Lord of this short day and endless night, where-
Ever I look I see the pure, white snow which swept like the hand
of Your grace across the earth that froze again, where-
Ever I look I see Your luminous presence, Your beauty, Your face.

'ISHA'

The Night Prayer

We come now to the final prayer, the season of a single day, a stark intercalary night set between the years to make our time
Come out right, to release us from the cycles, the circles which make up our birth and our death, the path from here called *sufiyyat*
Leading to the final revelation, the ultimate disclosure behind the veil of flesh a pure wind sweeping through the open space in Your
Presence, with Your clarity illuminating the long, dark night, brilliant comets hurtling towards the point from all directions, beloved Lord,
My only friend who has given me everything, has shown me everything, what stands before You now is no other than You, no different from
You, what stands before You now was brought here by the luminous sheikh, the *qutb* for this age whom You with infinite grace sent to find me,
The *qutb* who came as Your representative to explain the secrets and teach the mysteries, a father who cared for us, nourished us with Your food,
The truth, wisdom born of his inseparability from You, Your words, Your songs, Your compassion and seamless love which looked only at
Our light, inspiring and admonishing us to leave behind the passions and pleasures of this world for the unsullied bliss of Yours; this path
Which has no form, no church, no mosque is not accepted by the world, to them it looks sometimes merely mad, certainly disoriented, dislocated
From the jostling rush of markets, economies, governments, leaders, followers, cities, countries and certain companies whose policies and

Practices rule the world, for those who walk this path, who look only
to You, look only at You, look only for You, this path leads from
A night which has no return, a solitary night, unique, this night
with no beginning or end cannot be found but it can be lost, we must
Take each step wisely if we happen to turn up here because now the way is
steep and precarious, here where there is neither birth nor death and only
Room enough for one we must be inseparable from the heart of the guide
who brought us along, now the efforts of a lifetime must be on
Automatic, that means the prayer we pray has no time, no start or finish,
it also means we are finished with the world, finished with anything
Other than the supreme Lord, master of all that was, that is or will ever be,
we look only at Him, see only Him, exist only in Him, function
Only in Him, the realization of light by light, of truth by truth, purity
by purity, of the divine by the divine, there is no return since there
Is nothing to return, nothing left at all except Him. This is not a thing
the world will ever understand because their dreamers dream happily
Of the world and in that illusion discover visions which duplicate their
longings for themselves in the world, they do not weep for God,
They do not spend their aching days waiting for the night, praying
that He will appear, will validate the search with luminous signs which
Cannot be denied, they do not know the world of the soul, Your world,
Your life, Your truth, if they did, if they had a taste, a single drop
Of what You are the rest would shrivel, curl and die on its own,
nothing of consequence after all, the rewards and gratifications offered
So seductively, so persuasively by the beat and tune in a world without
conscience, without justice, without kindness, tolerance and love, without
The wisdom to know what wisdom is, O my beloved Lord we have seen
it, seen everything they have perversely transfigured from notes of Your
Grace to the disharmonic scale which scrapes across the darkness, flowing

figures breathing night and breeding night wherever they touch
Their grief, O my Beloved why must they turn away from You, why
must they take each good thing You have given and distort its
Purpose until the world is ready to crack and break beneath
the weight of murder, deception, greed and treachery, O my Beloved
Why can they not see this is not about a religion, You never did
send prophets with instructions to start a religion, You never taught
Us to fall in love with one religion and revile the rest, why do
they fail to see this is about You, Your power, Your essence, Your
Connection to all creation, necessary therefore to each of us, why do
they think it is enough to pray once a day or five times a day
Or once a week or once a year, why is it that among millions
and millions only a handful have that yearning to know You, to lie at Your
Feet in the prostrate posture of perfect love, why do they stop at the gate
instead of hammering the urgent blows to open it wide, why do they
Not love You my Beloved, why can they not recognize Your love
for us, love which surrounds us with such a brilliant fire
Of pure light it cancels the death and darkness of this intercalary
night, this night to end all night and the bleakness of years?

Up the street a mat of mauve crocuses has spread across the lawn
marking winter's end, a time when we wait for the colossal movement
Inside the earth to start it all again, but for those who have found the
path leading away from cycles of birth and death there is neither
End nor beginning, there is only You, only God exists, You alone are
truth, reality, permanence, You alone supreme Lord, exalted love, You
Alone define the totality of all the worlds, protecting, feeding and caring
for all living things in the finite and nonfinite worlds. O God grant
Me the words and the wisdom to describe who we are, You sent me here

at a time when it was possible to learn from the source of wisdom, Your
Divine explanation, Your *qutb* for this era, let him bring me the rest
of the way, let Your grace flow through him to all those who
Struggle to learn the truth in purity, let him guide the souls who
waited through the ages to be born in his time, to learn from him
The mysteries of creation and man's specific role, to study secrets
he alone had license to describe openly, O my Beloved You sent us
Such a being, a man of our own time to speak to us, to dispense
Your light in the overwhelming darkness ignorance generates, let us
Not fail him or You at the final moment, the intersection of light
with light, of grace with grace and prayer with prayer, when we
Face You everywhere, forever, inseparable from Your intention and Your
will, let me merge with him who is merged with You along that path
Which is so narrow, so perilous only one can pass on the way to You,
my Beloved, One, absolute, alone but the totality, silent but speaking
Clearly in the conversation of the heart where we are One, where I no
longer am because You alone exist. On this day of no day when only
Night prevails and a heavy rain filled with clattering sleet slants
across the roof, when the first fragile flowers close up tight against
The dark and no bird sings, even the ungainly crows have stilled their
rude demands, when we are reminded of our imminent mortality by
A sudden flurry of deaths and departures we stand alone on the small
hill of our lives with our face turned at last to You, without
Looking back to see where we have been, Orpheus turning for one
final, fatal glimpse of his bride, without longing for the things we
Have had and the things we never had, identity dropped, gone,
dissolved in the purifying wash of Your nearness, Your presence, all ties
To the world burned off in the acid bath of prayer and worship and
devotion to You, the world itself a prayer mat on which to prostrate

Before You through the long night of no time, no season and no duration
because only One exists, on this day of no day now we see the first four
Times of prayer as steps along the path to the One.

The early
morning prayer while our bodies are alive to all the creative
Disturbances flesh is prey to and our minds leap with every
generative joy of the arts which claim to describe who we are, this
Predawn clarity is the time we have to recognize that right
and wrong exist, that we are accountable for our words,
Our thoughts and feelings, that choice is ours no matter what
state or condition we find ourselves in, we must choose to
Walk towards You, Beloved, this is our birth in truth, rejecting
lies, deceit, falsehood, anger, arrogance, impatience and ingratitude,
Choosing truth, goodness and Your inextinguishable beauty as
the light in our lives, this is the time we have to discard feelings
Of arbitrariness and recognize the steady acceleration of time between
the beginning and the end, for ourselves and for the world, we
Have to acknowledge that You exist, You are the reality and our bodies
nothing but impermanence, an aggregate of ego, desire and the perishable
Elements of their composition, a fistful of earth, Adam the clay from
which we are made, O Allah this time of prayer is our first
Awakening in You. The second step, the midday prayer when we
are strong and young and the fires of anger, the fires of desire
Burn hot, burn hard, this is the prayer which rejects hunger, which
disallows with unflinching faith and certitude every devious, negative
Energy, every obsessive quality that grew over the truth, that obscured
You and who You are, at this time of prayer we have turned away
From wrong, from deception, from hurt and harm, from bad thoughts,

bad words and bad acts, we have pulled out the nails that
Fixed us to the cross of the body and accepted without compromise
the good, the qualities of disposition, the attributes of heart which
Take us to You, Your patience, gratitude, trust and surrender,
the unfailing praise we offer to You no matter what shadow this
Blazing noon casts across our path, we identify ourselves exclusively
with the goodness You manifest, the love, the tolerance, compassion,
Mercy, forgiveness, freedom, justice, equality, all the ideals we know to be
Your truth, all this we willingly, knowingly, lovingly accept because
We have cleaned out every dark corner where we thoughtlessly, even
shamelessly pasted over the good which is our natural, our true
Condition, the innocence and purity of the soul which comes from
God's own light, we have extracted the rampant weeds growing
Everywhere, every way, and made a place for the sweet scented flowers
that belong to You, we guard the gates of language like poets,
Remembering that a good word will culminate in a good act
while a bad word begins in an unclean place, we guard our actions
Like warriors who know the only battle to be fought is the battle
within, we guard the capricious avenues of thought like practitioners
Of wisdom who know the source of truth lies in absolute faith in You,
Allah, beloved Lord, supreme ruler of every world. Then the third
Prayer of late afternoon explodes in the heart, the third level on this
intricate journey where careful, determined steps alone will take us
Beyond the perils along the way, where unflinching purpose and absolute
faith are merely prerequisites for the exalted ascent we are
Required to make because we know, on this day of no day as
the wet snow falls, melts away and falls again we see this prayer
Shining brilliantly in the heart, a body of pure light which knows
You, recognizes You and stands facing You in a

Conversation that has just begun, remembrance of You formed by
letters of light which illuminate the heart, letters that spell meaning
To the inner heart where Your truth is a beacon lighting up everything in all
the infinite worlds, O Allah this prayer belongs to You because
You alone are the prayer, it comes from You and returns to You,
in this blissful sea of light where truth speaks to truth, where love
Is the great towering wave washed to the shore and beings of pure
light in radiant worship, in luminous prayer, repeat their constant
Remembrance, here where the letters of language are brilliant stars
composing each body of light, the inner Qur'an inscribed upon
The heart and read upon the face, here where the text is a resonance
which becomes letters of light we read the inner book of prayers
And praise Your mystery in radiant bliss. The fourth prayer on
this day that slips in between the cracks of time to make the
Calendar in our body turn out right, even though the sweet light
of the soul's grace has no time to reckon with, this prayer that
Comes just after the sun goes down is the prayer of nonexistence,
the prayer of merging with Allah our beloved Lord, when the
Projection of an individual self, ego and all that attaches to concepts
of me and mine disappear, *fana'*, extinction obliterating everything we
Might have taken ourselves to be, what survives this death before death
persists in God alone, subsists in God alone, the eclipse of the moon
By the sun. We have harnessed, we have mounted the wild horse of the mind
and risen in jeweled flight to Your presence where the lyric
Of conversation is pure revelation, Your voice, Your words, Your truth,
now we are inseparably Yours, we stay with You, continuing
In this world as nothing other than a light which might never
be seen by anyone but You, might never be known by anyone
But You, O Allah in this prayer we are One, there is no I

there is only You, there is no birth, there is no death, there is
No wrong there is only right, there is no harm there is only good
in that place where we have merged, where the icy wind which
Bends the trees in a rhythmic dance has stopped, where the world
no longer bends to a tune long gone, here the reality is You, Allah,
Here I do not exist at all, You are the only reality and the truth.

At the final prayer, the season of a single day when birth and death
Have been obliterated in a state known as *sufiyyat,* when the I is
fully merged in You, the fifth prayer which launches a perpetual
Prayer locked on the breath, the out-breath forgiveness and
the in-breath Your paradise of praise, a prayer beating through
The blood in each chamber of the heart then flowing in golden
streams drenching every cell, every fibre resonating with love
And the absolute certainty You alone exist, at this night prayer when
night no longer prevails, the light of a perfected being lives in
A state of man-God with You and You manifest in him as
God-man. This is not about religion, this is not about
Philosophy or doctrine, this is not about temples or churches
or hierarchies, it is only about You my God, only You,
Knowing You, being You and spreading Your inextinguishable light,
Your love, an indefinable sweetness which is pure fragrance,
Essence without sentiment, without attachment or demand; for
the perfected being who lives at that time of prayer there is
No such thing as lineage, this being comes directly from Allah as
His radiant light, an affirmation of the divine, His truth,
This is the explanation itself written in the body, the heart,
written in His letters which illuminate everything in
Existence, our past and our future clarified by that presence,

that light of pure wisdom and grace; for the perfected being who
Lives in the formless purity manifested as acts and attributes
of God Himself there is no need to reckon with tradition, what
Has come and gone has come and gone, what will happen is still to come,
history becomes irrelevant when his story is God's story which
He alone can recite, He alone can explain, He alone is, lineage means
only that you come from God and return to Him, tradition is
The purity of an inner book, the Qur'an revealed through time
to a messenger who might also be revered in memory as
The last prophet, but who came as light at the beginning and
remained, the light inextricably linked with the explanation
Alive in every heart. O Allah may the form of that light
be ours, may the gross be extinguished in the subtle, those
Exalted beings who live in this time of prayer are in a ceaseless
state called worship which has no beginning or end, the original
Five times of devotion are multiplied by every breath, a song sung
in Your praise by You, a loving act in Your name performed
By You, an explanation of Your truth offered in Your
wisdom by You. O this is the transcendent ecstasy from
Which there is no return, this is the light of Your grace made visible,
a comet seen every few thousand years, moving with remarkable
Deliberateness across the night revealing a structure never known
before, another sign to be recognized as proof if you are
Open to proof, this is the revelation delivered to absolute faith,
this is the great celestial event which could not happen up
There if it did not happen in here, this is the alphabet
which writes in light, letters composing the body of truth
Written in the body and in the seed of the soul, these letters of light
are the genetic scheme transcribed in the soul, an intention to be realized

In Your divinity, this perfectability born with the human soul from
the beginning is the indication that You are within us and even
More remarkably, we are within You, that the soul contains a capacity
to live as Your example revealing the love, truth, justice and
All the compassion flowing from Your essence, who You are; at this
time of prayer, this night prayer which has no night because there
Is no darkness, night lies suspended in perpetual light, there is no
aging because there is no time, there is no death because it has
Come and gone, there is nothing but You, Allah, nothing but You.

We thank You for every step of the way that brought us to You,
We thank You for the mercy which obscured the length of years ahead
when we first set out, we might have become fainthearted rather
Than fearless if we had known, and for the grace to understand each
subtle point along the way, especially things like Your will not mine,
Surrender, the extinction of ego, all that crashes against those tides
of the individualism we were taught as children and clung to, articles
Of faith, assumptions invalidated by the currents of wisdom which
washed us into a purer sea where sink or swim filtered much we
Had never thought to question, ideas, attitudes that worked in
the world but had little to do with life in God's house; we need
A guide, a wise man to teach us in an ordinary way but also in
an extraordinary way, immediate transmission which sends us
Flying past obstacles in our understanding that might otherwise
be permanent barricades, or takes us directly, experientially to
A new level, the deliberate intertwine of faith and wisdom catapulting
us to a new place where we breathe different air, eat different food
And reason with altered rules. Many years ago when I first came
to sit in the sun of my sheikh's wisdom and love, a question was put

To him, the conduct of a few men and women living together in a house
he had called God's house gave the appearance of impropriety, men
Visiting the women's rooms and women visiting the men's quarters; this
did not interest me much and I paid little attention although a lazy
Thought had begun to coalesce at the corner of my mind, ho hum
the thought distinctly said, what antiquated Victorian notion is this?
The room was crowded, devotees and aspirants sitting tightly locked
in a space which should have held half their number, I felt quite
Separate from the inquiry in progress until from a great distance the sheikh
turned his gaze on me, depthless eyes sweeping the room like the beacon
From a lighthouse that landed on me, my face, "And what do you think
my child?" came the question; I found myself in a desert on a high
Plateau, a night filled with stars and great open spaces leading
to laneways which looked down the corridors of my experience, in
The brief pause between the asking and the answering my life shifted
from one perspective to another, an on-off switch was reset and I
Would never see the world the same way again, when I replied it seemed
to me the voice that spoke lived on this high plateau among the stars,
"I have lived very differently," the answer began with a declaration of honesty
demanded by the purity in the open space, "But what you say is right,
For God's house we must live another way," a simple acknowledgment,
he had taken me to a place of understanding so radical, so revolutionizing
Nothing could ever be the way it was again. O Allah this was only
the beginning, a small step into the great space still to be travelled, this
Was not a revelation about You, it was about myself, clearing the path
of pointless debris which cluttered my way to You, which would have
Kept me from approaching, that transitional moment experienced in
a fully wakened, fully conscious state sitting in a crowded room, at
A moment when my attention had strayed, this was a gesture from the sheikh

showing the immediate grace of a true human being, a perfected man
Who lived the state of *sufiyyat,* this time of prayer beyond time, it
was a close indication, both personal and private, revealing our
Connection would exist at the open gateway to You, a place we
cannot find without the guidance of an enlightened being because it
Does not exist in this world, this space-time continuum, it must be
sought beyond the entrances and doorways known to us here, it must
Be sought at a time of prayer when time does not exist and we
do not exist, we must not be deceived by the presumptions of a
Clamoring self insisting upon its capacity to lift the veils, thousands
and thousands which hide the truth in mystery, and above all we
Must not be deceived by false or inadequate teachers who claim to know
what they do not practise—the signs of sanctity, of pure egolessness
Are clear to the melting heart, truth is not a business, it can never
be bought or sold, it is the pearl which has no price protected
In the master's heart; find this master, find this exquisite being
who manifests God's radiant light, His wisdom and attributes,
Find this selfless teacher whose only care is the duty he offers
to God by serving others, by transmitting what he knows and what
He is to those who come to learn with an open heart and an empty
cup. When he comes for you, and the truth is he will find
You, it's really not the other way around, his light has been shining
above you in this darkened night, his light has protected yours
From the beginning, in the world of souls before your birth, he
has been teaching you since the time of your birth into this world,
Saving you from the excesses of your lesser self when you didn't
see the danger until it was too late, changing the country where
You chose to live, changing the job where you chose to work, all
to make sure you would be where you needed to be when

The time was right.

O Allah not everyone will come to this
final time of prayer, You alone decide who does what, You
Alone determine the capacity of our soul but You also see
what You see and know what You know, You won't let go
Of us although we have to hang on too, we have to hang on,
to persist with ardent determination and cool sincerity, we
Must knock at every gate patient in the conviction it will
be opened, persist along every endless plateau until You reach
Down and lift us up to the next step, rising in the wisdom conferred
by pure faith, pure intention, pure thought and word, O Allah
Hear the prayer born of the connection to You in the place of no
place and the time of no time, hear this song sung by the soul
In bliss, standing before You but not separate from You, without
and within at the same time, urgent, pleading, begging, longing
For the state which leaves death behind in oneness with You,
we have seen that state of prayer up close in the perfected
Being You sent, we know his experience of You from the slipstream
he created around himself, the power of his faith and wisdom
Engaging our own reality on a plane we could not otherwise
approach. O Allah tie up the fibres of our being in the single
Breath of affirmation, You alone exist and we dissolve in Your
permanence, we disappear in the flesh and live only as letters of light,
A text written in Your name by Your hand, the inner Qur'an
inscribing who and what we are, a book of truth
And love, a book whose pages we must turn specifically day
by day, *waqt* by *waqt,* because now we exist only to serve You,
We live in Your divine quality of mercy, of justice and compassion, we live

in the surrender to You which cancels the roaring demands of ego and
The self that lives in separation from You, the surrender which drowns
all desire and stops the mind in its tracks, we understand the need
To return what You have given by offering Your explanation to
anyone who wants to know, O Allah at this time of prayer we
Become You and You become who we are, we are also revealed
within the mystery of who You are. At this our final time of prayer
We have come beyond death, have left death behind by dying to the self,
by examining and exposing every film sequence, the positive and
The negative, on which the words, the thoughts and acts of our
life have been recorded, we have studied each fault with
Justice, with compassion and made restitution, compensating for our
frailties and weaknesses of the past so fully that nothing remains
To be paid, there is no debt, our accounts balance, the recording angels
who monitor and write down what we say, what we do, what we
Think will have nothing but good to report, the bad has already been
expunged, every part of the body will say truthfully courageous things,
Describing a share in some good action when it is called to testify;
if there is nothing left to be judged there is no judgment, there is only
An inscription in light announcing Your name, saying You alone exist
O Allah, You alone exist O Allah, we are free of the strident self,
Free of the entertaining antics that ego presents in its posturing, its
longing to be known and congratulated, released from the desires that
Grew like unwanted weeds in a carefully cultivated garden, alive in
the clear open space of Your praise, Your service, the need to serve
Your creation, all things that live; detached from the attachments
that bind the individuated self we exist in the melting heart which
Knows only the joys and sorrows of others as if they were our own, we
breathe and with every breath we remember You, our blood circulates

And with every pulse Your name resounds in our veins, the nerves
and flesh, we eat Your food and drink Your bliss, we see with eyes
Which see only You, we hear with ears which hear only You, we catch
the scent of Your fragrant presence as we breathe in and speak
With a tongue which can only pronounce Your name, we taste only
You and live in the melting truth of the heart where there is
No I and You alone exist O Allah.

These are the obligations we
acquire because this is what we have become in the annihilating love
Which cancels life and death, which transects time along an axis,
a light beginning and ending in You, this is the translation from
Flesh to light, from the silence of nonexistence to the resonance of eternally
pure existence, this is the transforming love that demands only one
Sacrifice, the self and its blatant demands, this love ignited by wisdom
alone, the luminous treasure, the total realization rising in
Absolute faith, this love which fills everything everywhere is the sweet
truth we gain in the night of *fana'*, an extinction which frees
The soul to be one with You, to exist in You subsisting in Your
love, a love we have seen in the gracious presence You sent among us
As the explanation he learned directly from You, the radiant love
expanding without limit around every being who stood before him or
Stayed away, the love looking at us through a lens of inexhaustible
mercy, seeing us as we were without rejection or condition or exception,
Offering love, being love, inspiring love, this soaring example was
an expression, the essential sweetness, the undefinable nectar which
Could be savored and drunk endlessly without ever tiring of it,
without boredom or satiation or fatigue, this luminous clarity
Which belongs to You alone Allah was lodged in the heart of a man,

a perfected being whose life culminated in that pure love and wisdom
Dispensed through Your unimaginable abundance, a gift showered upon
us all. We have lived with such a being, the proof, the verification,
What it means to be born into the human species, and because we have
seen him, listened to him, talked to him, lived our lives with him
We have been brought to this final time of prayer, now we come
to the true beginning, now we have found our way through
The dark woods, we understand resolve and determination,
we have cut the deep entanglements our birth entails and
Travelled the path of truth to the place where wisdom commits us
to light, the place where we learned to turn our face away from
the world and towards You alone, we have been brought to
an open resonant space which began our conversation with You,
A prayer asking for nothing but You, affirmation, praise, solitude,
colloquies of light, qualities of light and then beyond to
The place of no place, a radiant point, merging, oneness and
beyond again, the transcendent birth in You which has no death.

Five Times of Prayer is a mystical Sufi explanation of the five daily prayers performed under the umbrella known as Islam, the path to purity, the surrender to light. Poet and novelist Sharon Marcus offers her own ecstatic verification of the mysteries embedded in these five prayers, each prayer represented by one section of this book length poem. As a map to the metaphors of spiritual ascent, the five sections simultaneously reflect stages of revelation for the world, for the body of the soul and divine knowledge. A contemplation which is both personal and anecdotal takes the poet through an understanding of her connection to God, to M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, her Sufi master, and to an understanding of her life in prayer.

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